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**SEXUAL SUBJECTS:
A FEMINIST POST-STRUCTURALIST ANALYSIS
OF FEMALE ADOLESCENT SEXUAL
SUBJECTIVITY AND AGENCY**

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Abstract

Research and intervention into female adolescent sexual health in the context of HIV/AIDS have been dominated by individualistic, cognitive perspectives, which present sexuality as a site of rational, individual choice and agency. A paradigm shift has occurred in recent years, advanced with the realisation that decision-making around sexual health is not driven by rational reasoning alone but, rather, is complexly intertwined with social/discursive constructions of gender and sexuality which, in turn, are enmeshed with processes of signification and relations of power.

Drawing upon feminist, post-structuralist and discourse analytic theoretical, methodological and analytical frames, the study focuses on the discourses available to young women for making meaning out of their experiences with their bodies, their relationships and sexual choices, and explores how gendered constructions of (female adolescent) sexuality alternatively enable or undermine adolescent girls' sexual health. A Foucauldian discourse analysis was carried out on the transcripts of focus groups discussions and individual interviews held with a group of 20 heterosexual adolescent girls, encompassing a diverse wealth and racial spectrum of a local South African setting.

The study highlights the inadequacy of rational choice models when applied to young women's experiences and decision-making in the realm of their sexuality. Gendered power relations, which are found to be mediated by other lines of social inequality, such as race and class, and by social processes operating both within and beyond the heterosexual dyad, constrain young women's ability to take control and take care of their bodies in their heterosexual relationships. Male privilege and power in young women's heterosexual relationships are found to be reproduced by overt displays of male dominance and, significantly, through more subtle processes whereby young women's sexuality is defined in relation to, and centred on a partner's needs. This scenario is sustained by the absence of a positive discourse of female sexuality and desire available to young women. Young women are found to view themselves from the perspective of others when making decisions surrounding their sexuality. Concern with meeting their partners' needs and fear of social censure (from adults, peers and partners) makes it difficult for young women to mobilise either sexual pleasure or

safety in heterosexual relationships and encounters. Young women are found to be more concerned with the social costs of adopting 'safe' sexual practices than with the health consequences of not doing so. Gendered cultural norms and role expectations are found to be relatively continuous across racial and class groupings, and reflective of findings drawn from international contexts.

Study recommendations include the need to develop a research and intervention paradigm which: conceives of (female) adolescent sexual health in a holistic manner – encompassing both its positive as well as negative manifestations; promotes a positive discourse on female sexuality; foregrounds social constructions of sexuality, gender and power relations; targets young men as well as young women – in single-sex and mixed-sex group settings; and which takes the views of young people seriously, and approaches their experiences of sexuality in a non-judgemental and holistic manner.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Why a study on female adolescent sexuality?

Embarking on a dissertation on female adolescent (hetero)sexuality is a daunting task. The ‘facts’ about female adolescent sexuality are, apparently, everywhere – in academic, educational and popular text. One might be forgiven for asking: do we really need more information about female adolescent sexuality? However, as this thesis will argue, despite the proliferation of talk, writing and practice surrounding female adolescent sexuality, there are certain aspects of this subject matter that nonetheless remain silenced and unacknowledged in both research and educational practice.

Primarily, a key argument of this thesis will be that the complex (embodied) subjectivity of adolescent girls is still largely missing from academic writings about adolescent female sexuality. As Michelle Fine (1988) observed in her seminal paper on sexuality education curricula in schools, academic and popular texts “offer the authority of facts” but, “[a]lthough the facts usually involve the adolescent female body, little has been heard from young women themselves” (p. 29). Almost two decades later, I find - despite the fact that studies of prevalence and prevention of teenage pregnancy and HIV/STI infection have grown into a virtual ‘industry’ (Tolman & Diamond, 2001; Wilbraham, 2005) of sexuality research – adolescent girls remain ‘spoken of’, ‘spoken for’ and ‘spoken to’, but rarely emerge as embodied, ‘speaking’ subjects in the contemporary sexuality research and educational paradigm. This dissertation seeks to direct attention to the complex, embodied sexual

subjectivities of young women, in the interest of addressing and promoting female adolescent sexual health.

Understanding sexual ‘risk’

On a global scale, AIDS is increasingly recognised as an issue for those who engage in heterosexual sex (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Scott, Sharpe & Thomson, 1991). In the context of South Africa, where this study was set, HIV is spread primarily through heterosexual transmission (Abdool Karim, 2005), and prevalence rates are highest amongst the youth population, and amongst young women in particular (Harrison, 2005). According to a study of the demographic impact of HIV/AIDS in South Africa (Dorrington, Johnson, Bradshaw & Daniel, 2006), national HIV prevalence rates amongst female youth are almost five times those of their male counterparts.

Individualism in research and intervention

Efforts to address the spread of HIV/AIDS in South Africa, and globally, have tended to present sexuality as a site of rational, individual choice and agency. This is evident in the highly individualistic KABP (Knowledge-Attitudes-Beliefs-Practices) survey instruments that have dominated HIV/AIDS research, and the almost exclusive reliance upon information-based intervention campaigns (Campbell, 2003; Campbell & Hayes, 1998; MacPhail, 1998).

The KABP paradigm of research shows a heavy reliance upon theoretical models of behaviour that have been developed within the general domain of health psychology, used to influence other ‘health behaviours’ (e.g. smoking; diet; exercise). The most prominent of these theories fall under the category of (social)-cognitive models (Eaton, Flisher & Aarø, 2003). The major theories of behaviour that have been applied to understanding ‘HIV risk behaviours’ fall under this approach, and include the Health Belief Model (Becker, 1988; Janz & Becker, 1984); the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1970) and its revised form, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, as cited in Eaton et al., 2003); and Social Cognitive

Learning Theory (Bandura, 1991)¹. These models vary in the extent to which individual perceptions and ways of thinking are related to the social and cultural context – and later models incorporate ‘socially’-related variables (Crossley, 2000). Regardless of this distinction, however, “the consistent feature of all these models is their assumption that a person’s engagement with health-related behaviours depends on a rational process of weighing up potential costs and benefits of such behaviour” (Crossley, 2000, p. 38). The KABP paradigm of research rests upon the assumption of individual rationality and causality (Ingham, Woodcock & Stenner, 1992; Joffe, 1996) and has fed into an HIV intervention paradigm which relies predominantly upon disseminating information, with the expectation that this will, in and of itself, lead to the uptake of ‘safe’ sexual practices.

Large-scale health educational campaigns in South Africa, such as loveLife, lambaste young people with the message that ‘you are free to choose your own future’ (Thomas, 2004). Posel (2004) states that this health education campaign, which targets young women in particular, “is an effort to constitute an essentially modern sexual subject, one who is knowledgeable, responsible, in control and free to make informed choices” (Posel, 2004, p. 58).

However, studies that have tested models of rational decision-making have found these of limited utility in predicting the uptake of safer sexual practices. Despite the concerted efforts of educational campaigns, young people continue to engage in unprotected sex, and prevalence rates are on the rise (Eaton et al., 2003). Recent arguments hold that, if we are to curb the spread of HIV, it is necessary to contextualise discussions of sexual ‘risk’ within a framework for understanding sexuality, and move away from purely biomedical responses.

Debating the ‘nature’ of sexuality

The ‘nature’ of sexuality is, however, a subject of much contestation and debate. Researchers have adopted different ways of thinking about, investigating and explaining ‘the sexual’. Harding (1998) points out that the distinction most commonly

¹ See Bartholomew, Parcel and Kok (2001) for an overview of these approaches

made is between 'essentialist' and 'social constructionist' approaches. In the first approach, sexuality is perceived to be a 'biological' phenomenon, while in the second case, sexuality is perceived to be a 'social' phenomenon.

More generally, until recently, heterosexuality has received little critical attention and has been under-theorised (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1993; Richardson, 1996; Shefer & Potgieter, 2006). Sex research has been dominated by sexological discourse, which has resulted in an academic commonsense that deems heterosexuality as natural and normal, and which has treated and produced male and female sexuality in differentiated and complementary terms (Harding, 1998). Due to the efforts of feminism, and the urgent need to address the spread of HIV/AIDS, heterosexuality has been increasingly problematised, however (Shefer & Potgieter, 2006). Scientists' conception of sex had the effect of 'naturalising' gender relations: that is, giving the impression that they were determined by an underlying nature, and so were inevitable (Harding, 1998). The 'naturalness' of contemporary sexuality, gender roles and attitudes was undermined by radical movements in the 1970s, provoked by feminist and queer theories (Parker & Gagnon, 1995). Feminists have offered forceful analyses of sexuality and the body which "identify 'normal' heterosexual practices and relationships not just as social rather than natural, but as constructed in men's interests to control women's bodies and subordinate women" (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 1993, p. 240). A growing body of feminist psychological literature has started to explore heterosexual dynamics in more critical terms (e.g. Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1993). In recent years, it has been argued that the taken-for-granted sexual practices and identities of the two genders are central to understanding and overcoming the barriers to HIV/AIDS prevention through safe sexual practices (Shefer & Potgieter, 2006):

[U]nequal relations of power between men and women are not simply of academic interest. In the context of HIV/AIDS they are literally life and death issues, for men as well as women. (Wilton, 1994, p. 4).

Paradigm shift: From rational decision-maker to non-unitary, discursively-constituted subject

Internationally, and in South Africa, the study of sexual decision-making and behaviour in the context of HIV/AIDS has seen a paradigm shift from the KABP paradigm to a post-structuralist one. This shift has been advanced along with the realisation that decision-making surrounding sexual health is not driven by rational reasoning alone but, rather, is complexly intertwined with social constructions of sexuality which, in turn, are enmeshed with processes of signification and relations of power. The policy of individual responsibility for safer sex is shown to be 'at odds' with the material relations of power at play within heterosexual encounters (Holland et al., 1991). Without minimising other sites of power differences, such as race, class and ethnicity, what is particularly significant in the negotiation of safer sex in heterosexual encounters is the power which men can exercise over women.

Sex, as it is currently socially constructed in its various forms, cannot simply be understood as a pleasurable physical activity, it is redolent with symbolic meanings. These meanings are inseparable from gendered power relations and are active in shaping heterosexual interaction. (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Scott, Sharpe & Thomson, 1990, p. 339)

Sexuality is intimately linked to gender, and is often shaped by gender expectations and norms. Researchers working within a social constructionist paradigm have exposed how gendered meanings are one vehicle through which sexuality is constituted. Research attending to social constructions of sexuality and gender views the sexual 'choices' available to the adolescent girl as intimately related to the discourses available to her for making meaning out of her experiences with her body and her relationships (Tolman, Striepe & Harmon, 2003). Specifically, an important body of literature (reviewed in chapter two) is pointing towards the manner whereby gendered constructions of female and male (adolescent) sexuality undermine adolescent girls' sexual health. Studies have revealed that dominant cultural conceptions of female sexuality as passive, devoid of desire, and subordinate to male needs and desires make it difficult for women, young and old, to actively negotiate either their safety or pleasure in heterosexual relationships. This theoretical shift has

been accompanied by a methodological shift, favouring (small-scale) qualitative studies which can investigate socially-constructed meanings of sexuality, and their intersection with relations of power.

Internationally and in South Africa, researchers are coming to the conclusion that gender is a fundamental aspect of adolescent sexual health, and needs to be included in both theoretical models as well as intervention (Burns, 2002; Morrell, Moletsane, Abdool Karim, Epstein & Unterhalter, 2002; Tolman et al., 2003; Weiss & Rao Gupta, 1998; Weiss, Whelan & Rao Gupta, 1996; 2000). In the South African context, gender inequalities play a significant role in the gender patterning of HIV transmissions among all sectors and populations (Morrell et al., 2002). In this regard, addressing the complex gender dynamics at play in heterosexual negotiation is an urgent task for social scientists addressing both gender inequality and HIV/AIDS infection (Burns, 2002; Shefer & Foster, 2001; Wood & Foster, 1995).

Critiquing the ‘at risk’ category

Social research into HIV/AIDS has been redolent with stereotypes surrounding adolescent sexuality (MacPhail, 1998). The prevailing research tradition tends to rely upon a deficit model of adolescent sexuality. The ‘problematic’ nature of adolescent sexuality is often stressed, as is its common association with ‘disordered’ patterns of consumption, such as drug and alcohol abuse, with delinquent behaviour, and other factors such as irresponsibility, poor school performance and unemployment (Griffin, 1993; Harris, 2004; Moore & Rosenthal, 1993).

Griffin (1993) observes that one of the most powerful elements in hegemonic discourses about the youth is the continued importance of biological determinism and the onset of puberty as the “defining moment” of adolescence: through this, adolescence becomes a unitary category which is distinct from and preliminary to adulthood and maturity” (p. 11). Adolescence is treated, via the ‘storm and stress’ model (cf. Hall, 1905), as a period of unprecedented emotional and hormonal turmoil which is highly sexualised, so that young people are assumed to be prone to particularly ‘promiscuous’ sexual behaviour. The transition discourse (which positions young people as lacking in the necessary rationality and knowledge of

adulthood), reinforced by the construction of adolescence as an inevitable time of storm and stress, which is highly sexualised, has fed powerfully into academic explanations for teenage pregnancy and HIV infection. This literature often posits ignorance concerning sexuality, contraception and reproductive biology, irrational and risky behaviour, irrational decision-making, and (faulty) perceptions of invulnerability as key contributors to reproduction and HIV infection amongst the youth population (Aggleton, 1991; Aggleton & Warrick, 1990; Macleod, 2006; MacPhail, 1998). Such recycled configurations of *all* young people as naturally predisposed to 'risky' sexual behaviours/practices directs attention away from the societal factors – such as power relations and social inequalities that render certain groups more systematically vulnerable to HIV than others (Aggleton & Campbell, 2000).

While critique has been levelled at the tendency to stereotype adolescents, and construct them as a homogenous group, there has also been more detailed analysis and critique of how lines of social variation, including gender, race and class, are treated when these issues do enter the research agenda. While virtually all other areas of research into adolescence take white, middle class males as the subject of study (see Gilligan, 1989; Greene, 2003), investigations of adolescent sexuality have focussed disproportionately upon girls, particularly poor girls, and girls of colour, whose sexuality is portrayed as disproportionately problematic (Fine & Macpherson, 1992; Tolman & Diamond, 2001). Feminist deconstructive analyses of the literature have found that this body of research implicitly reproduces dominant ideologies about differences between male and female sexuality, as well as between ethnic minorities and white teenagers (Griffin, 1993; Macleod, 2006; Macleod & Durrheim, 2002; Tolman & Diamond, 2001).

The systematic and relentless surveillance of adolescents and their sexual behaviour reflects society's anxiety and ambivalence about childhood and adolescent sexuality, and translates in a tendency to overlook the subjective quality of young people's experiences (Fine, 1988; Tolman & Diamond, 2001). The almost exclusive reliance upon the survey method "has framed and limited for girls what the pertinent questions and possible answers are about what is important in the development of their sexuality" (Tolman & Szalacha, 1999, p. 8). Young women, and young people more generally, are pervasively treated as scientific 'objects' of study and their sexuality a

target for 'expert' surveillance, management and control, rather than as subjects who are actively engaged in making meaning of their sexuality. The neglect of young people's subjective experiences of sexuality, and the rarity of young people's perspectives in the prevailing research paradigm may, once again, be linked to the academic construction of adolescence as a time of inevitable 'storm and stress', whereby young people "can barely be treated as rational, still less as individuals whose perspective should be taken as equal" (Aggleton & Campbell, 2000, p. 285).

In order for HIV/AIDS interventions to be effective, it is necessary to begin with a clear idea of young people's sexual health needs. However, much existing work adopts a negative definition of sexual health, equating this with the absence of STIs and the avoidance of pregnancy, rather than the presence of such qualities as sexual pleasure and empowerment (Aggleton, 1991; Aggleton & Campbell, 2000). Researchers have argued that adolescent sexual health needs to be seen as more than just the opposite of risk, and the avoidance of harm (Roker & Coleman, 1998). There is a need to move away from a deficit model of adolescence sexuality, and direct focus upon the positive, life-affirming nature of this aspect of human development (Moore & Rosenthal, 1998). However, as Tolman and Diamond (2001) note, research focussing on 'normal', 'healthy' development in adolescence often receives far less attention than large-scale surveys of sexual activity and contraception use, because this does not aim to answer the questions that are deemed to have more political valence: such as the prevalence and prevention of risky behaviours. Additionally, as these researchers note, this requires a different methodological approach than is typical for standard social scientific enquiry.

Despite the fact that mainstream psychology has conducted extensive enquiry into female adolescent sexual behaviour, and has a long history of theorising sexual development, there is a paucity of studies that address the question of female desire. Recent work of several feminist scholars has suggested that girls' subjective experiences of sexuality and sexual desire in particular are a significant albeit neglected force in girls' development (e.g. Thompson, 1984; 1990; Tolman, 1994; 2000; Tolman & Schalaza, 1999) and, as such, are potentially crucial in girls' developing a sense of sexual entitlement and empowerment (Fine, 1988; Tolman, 1994; 2000).

(Re-)Defining female adolescent sexual health

The tension between sexual danger and pleasure is a powerful one in women's lives. Sexuality is simultaneously a domain of restriction, repression and danger as well as a domain of exploration, pleasure, and agency. To focus only on pleasure and gratification ignores the patriarchal structure in which women act, yet to speak only of sexual violence and oppression ignores women's experience with sexual agency and choice and unwittingly increases the sexual terror and despair in which women live. (Vance, 1984, p. 1)

This study defines 'sexual health' within broader parameters than are commonly employed within biomedical discourse that currently dominates research and intervention surrounding (female) adolescent sexual health. For feminists (see Potts, 2002), existing definitions of 'safe' sex and sexual health – which focus narrowly upon the prevention of HIV transmission, and to some extent, other sexually transmitted infections – fail to consider other kinds of risk that are specific to women's experiences in heterosexual relationships: including rape, sexual abuse and sexual coercion. Feminists have argued, additionally, that addressing the risks that women run in and from their sexuality should not overshadow or remove the possibility of engagement with the positive aspects of female sexuality, including pleasure (e.g. Hollway, 1996; Jackson, 1996; Vance, 1984). In fact, addressing the positive aspects of female sexuality has been defined as one of the strategic means whereby existing gender arrangements and power dynamics, which limit women's potential to take control and take care of their bodies and well-being in heterosexual relationships, may be challenged (see chapter two).

The imperative to address HIV/AIDS has shown how little we know about the social construction of sexuality. The imperative to address the heterosexual transmission of HIV/AIDS presents us with an opportunity to reassess and redefine heterosexuality. Nonetheless, the life-and-death challenge of HIV/AIDS should not divert attention away from a consideration of the positive, life-affirming and empowering aspects of sexuality. An exclusive focus upon 'risk' ignores the potential for agency and empowerment, and grants young women a very constricted space within which to negotiate and experience their sexuality.

Theoretical frames and research question

This study is grounded within a feminist post-structuralist or post-modern framework (see Gavey, 1997; Weedon, 1987). Weedon (1987) defines feminist post-structuralism as “a mode of knowledge production which uses post-structuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand existing power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change” (p. 40-41). Post-structuralist approaches to knowledge reject the possibility of an absolute, universal truth or objectivity that lie at the cornerstone of mainstream, positivist theorising in psychology (Gavey, 1997; Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn & Walkerdine, 1984). From a post-structuralist perspective, knowledge is considered to be socially constructed, never neutral, and always related to power. This approach towards knowledge is connected to the post-structuralist contention that “all meaning and knowledge is discursively constituted through language and other signifying practices” (Gavey, 1997, p. 53). Language, in post-structuralist theory, is not considered as an expression or reflection of an “already given social reality”: rather, language “constitutes social reality for us” (Weedon, 1987, p. 21). This view of language “is in marked contrast to the liberal humanist view of language as transparent and expressive, merely reflecting and describing (pre-existing) subjectivity and human experience in the world” (Gavey, 1997, p. 53). In post-structuralist theory, language is the common factor in the analysis of social organisation, meaning, power and individual consciousness:

Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of selves, our subjectivity, is *constructed*. (Weedon, 1987, p. 21).

Feminist post-structuralism is heavily influenced by the Foucauldian notion that “language is always located in discourse” (Gavey, 1997, p. 53). This theory will be elaborated in greater depth in chapter two.

This study focuses on the discursive construction of female adolescent sexual subjectivity/ies within adolescent girls’ talk surrounding sexuality. The study draws upon material produced during focus group discussions and individual interviews with

a group of 20 (self-identified) heterosexual adolescent girls, representing a socio-economically and racially diverse demographic of a local South African setting. Drawing upon feminist post-structuralist theoretical, methodological and analytical frames, the dissertation explores the forms of sexual subjectivity that emerge within the participants' accounts, how these are constructed in and through, and infiltrated by discourses, cultural narratives and ideologies, and to what extent these forms of sexual subjectivity alternatively enable or undermine female sexual agency and health. The research questions framing this thesis are therefore:

1. How do adolescent girls *speak* about (their) sexuality? And how are they *spoken to*?
2. How are their accounts *constructed* in and through discourses, cultural narratives and ideologies?
3. What forms of sexual *subjectivity* emerge within their accounts?
4. What bearing do these forms of subjectivity have for female adolescent sexual *agency*?

Organisation of dissertation

This chapter has introduced the central contours of the thesis, and contextualised the point of departure for this dissertation. Chapter two elaborates the theoretical frames within which this study is located, drawing heavily upon feminist post-structuralist theorising of (1) language, power and subjectivity and (2) (hetero)sexuality, gender, power and the body. This is followed with an overview of findings drawn from empirical studies of gender, power and heterosexuality, conducted in South Africa and internationally. Chapter three covers methodological and analytical issues. The analytical component of this thesis is contained within the fourth chapter. The analysis explores the discourses available to young women for making meaning of their bodies and experiences in their sexuality, and how these alternatively enable and undermine their ability to take control and take care of their bodies in heterosexual relationships. The final chapter of the thesis summarises and synthesises the key arguments of the thesis, discusses methodological issues and limitations, weighs up the significance of female adolescent sexual subjectivity as a topic of theoretical, feminist and practical relevance, and provides a number of recommendations for

researchers and practitioners working within the area of female adolescent sexual health.

CHAPTER 2

Theoretical frames and empirical literature review

Chapter one provided an overview of the theoretical departure points for this dissertation. This chapter elaborates the theoretical framing of this dissertation in greater depth. Following this, a body of empirical research is presented, which has started to map out the manner whereby social constructions of gender and sexuality constrain young women's ability to take control and take care of their bodies in heterosexual relationships.

Theoretical frames

The study and theorisation of sexuality has been pervaded by contestation surrounding how much weight or influence should be attributed to 'the individual', on the one hand, and 'the social' on the other, in shaping 'the sexual'. On a broader level, this question draws attention to a problem that has been faced by social psychologists particularly, and social scientists in general: that of reconciling or bridging what has been termed the "individual-society divide" (Henriques et al., 1984, p. 13). In their seminal work, *Changing the subject: Psychology, social regulation and subjectivity*, Henriques and colleagues (1984) argue that overcoming this problem cannot be achieved if the basic terms of this couple are left untouched i.e. if 'the individual' and 'the social' respectively are continued to be conceptualised as existing in a dualistic relationship to one another, and as the fundamental basis to reality. Instead of attempting to make traditional analyses, rooted within the individual, "more social", these authors argue for an approach that conceives of individuals not simply as acted

upon by social processes, but “*constituted through* the social domain” (Henriques et al., 1984, p. 17, italics added).

The non-unitary, discursively-constituted subject

In the Foucauldian sense, the subject is determined by multiple discourses, is not purely rational or unitary, and is potentially contradictory. In this regard, the post-structuralist subject is no longer coterminous with the individual.

We use ‘subjectivity’ to refer to individuality and self-awareness - the condition of being subject - but understand in this usage that subjects are dynamic and multiple, always positioned in relation to discourses and practices and produced by these - the condition of being subject. (Henriques et al., 1984, p. 3)

In Foucault's work, discourses are “ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and the relations between them” (Weedon, 1987, p. 108). Discourses are “practices which *systematically form* the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1972, p. 49, italics added). In this sense, as Weedon (1987) notes, “[d]iscourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the ‘nature’ of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern” (p. 108). Thus, our bodies, thoughts and feelings do not have meaning outside of their discursive articulation. Furthermore, the ways in which discourses constitute the minds and bodies of individuals are always part of a wider network of material power relations (Gavey, 1997; Henriques et al., 1984; Weedon, 1987). In this regard, we do not need to see the concept of discourse as being antagonistic to a material ‘reality’; rather we should see discourse as “as the result of a practice of production that is at once material, discursive and complex” (Henriques et al., 1984, p. 106). The feminist post-structuralist framework within which this study is located “maintains an emphasis on the material bases of power (for example, social, economic, and cultural arrangements) and the need for change at this level of discourse. This emphasis distinguishes it from some post-structuralist approaches that are highly abstract and apparently ‘apolitical’” (Gavey, 1997, p. 54).

Discourses offer 'subject positions' for individuals to take up, and make meaning of their experiences. However, discourses vary in their accessibility and authority or power (Blood, 2005; Gavey, 1992; 1997; Gavey & McPhillips, 1999). The individual subject cannot be seen as 'freely' (or always consciously) 'picking and choosing' a version of experience from the discursive possibilities available to her: as Gavey (2002) warns, we should not fall back on the idea that there is a "non-discursive self", with "subject positions interpreted simply as alternative modes of being or acting that can be chosen or discarded as freely as items on the supermarket shelf" (p. 435). Because of the relationship between discourse, power and subjectivity, young women are most likely to be positioned within dominant, prevailing discourses (Gavey, 1992). Gavey and McPhillips (1999) note that the discourses which are closely aligned with everyday, common-sense assumptions about the world are: the *most powerful* in constituting subjectivity; their influence most likely to remain *hidden and unidentified* by the individual subject; and therefore, the *most difficult to resist*. Nonetheless, subjects are in no simple or deterministic way constituted by dominant discourses; at any given point in space or time, other discursive influences are at play, which may offer up alternative sets of expectations and understandings about the world. This can result in inconsistent or even contradictory experiences.

What does post-structuralist theorisation of subjectivity offer for an analysis of young women's sexuality and decision-making? First, it debunks the 'rational choice' model that has characterised major theories of sexual behaviour applied to understanding 'safe sex', and gives insight into why young women's experiences may be incoherent or their behaviours contradictory to what they 'know'. Second, it contextualises experience, offering insight into how young women's experiences of sexuality are always constituted through discourse, and mediated by material relations of power. Finally, it offers a more nuanced analysis of power than is offered within humanism: it deconstructs the monolithic, unitary character of power and the social domain: "This enables us to make links between a diverse and contradictory social domain and the multiple contradictory subject" (Henriques et al., 1984, p. 92). These points will be elaborated in the discussion below.

Sexuality as socially constructed

It is now well-recognised that sexuality, rather than being a 'natural' pre-existent entity or essence inhering in the individual, is a social construction (e.g. Harding, 1998; Richardson, 1996; Rubin, 1984; Vance, 1984; Weeks, 1985; 1986; Wilkinson & Kitinger, 1993). Foucault represents one of the strongest voices against viewing sexuality in essentialist terms:

Sexuality must not be described as a stubborn drive, by nature alien and of necessity disobedient to a power which exhausts itself trying to subdue it and often fails to control it entirely. It appears rather as an especially dense transfer point for relations of power: between men and women, young people and old people, parents and offspring, teachers and students, priests and laity, an administration and a population (Foucault, 1978, p. 103).

For Foucault, sexuality is not a seething mass of natural drives that our society has repressed: rather, he posits that our sexual practices, desires, subjectivities and forms of identity have been produced through and continue to be produced through the 'deployment of sexuality' (Gavey, 1992). For Foucault, "sexuality ... is nothing other than the effect of power" (Grosz, 1994, p. 154). Sexuality is seen as a primary locus of power in contemporary society; it is deployed as a domain of regulation and social control through constituting subjects and governing them by exercising control through their bodies (Gavey, 1992; Weedon, 1987). This theorisation offers an understanding of sexuality within which the discursive positions available to men and women cannot be taken as 'natural' or 'fixed', and cannot be construed as neutral: "sexuality is deployed in ways that are directly related to power" (Gavey, 1992, p. 327).

The radical feminist movement of the 1970s played an important role in undermining the 'naturalness' of contemporary sexuality, gender roles and sexual attitudes (Harding, 1998; Parker & Gagnon, 1995). Radical feminists have offered forceful analyses of sexuality and the body which "identify 'normal' heterosexual practices and relationships not just as *social* rather than natural, but as constructed in men's interests to control women's bodies and subordinate women" (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 1993, p. 240).

However, despite these gains, radical feminists have tended to rely upon repressive models of power (Blood, 2005; Holland, Ramazanoglu, Scott & Thomson, 1994a; Sawicki, 1991). Power is understood, within this framework, as 'belonging' to an individual or group, and wielded over those who do not 'have it': "In a patriarchal society, this means that the oppressors (men) 'have' power and exercise it over the oppressed (women)" (Blood, 2005, p. 48). Within this model, "women appear largely as victims of patriarchal desires, rather than as social actors who might *participate* in predominant social practices and ideologies" (Blood, 2005, p. 47). While feminists conceive of the body as produced by power, the body is nonetheless conceptualised as "the 'natural' body overlaid with the social" (Blood, 2005, p. 49).

Disciplinary power and docile bodies: Normalisation and self-discipline

In Foucault's work, the body is central to any analysis of power. Foucault goes beyond early feminist theorising, however, by conceiving of the body as "thoroughly social, produced within power/discourse" (Blood, 2005, p. 49). In *Discipline and Punish* (1979), Foucault outlines a particular form of power that has predominated in modern times. Modern or *disciplinary* power marked the birth of a form of power aimed at taking hold of bodies:

not only so that they may do *what* one wishes, but so that they may operate *as* one wishes, with the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus, discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). (Foucault, 1979, p. 138, italics added)

In this sense, disciplinary power is 'positive': "[d]iscipline 'makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of power that regards individuals both as objects and instruments of its exercise" (Foucault, 1979, p. 209). Jeremy Bentham's design for the Panopticon, a model prison, encapsulates, for Foucault, the essence of a disciplinary society. The Panopticon is a watchtower structure within the prison into which the prisoners could not see, and which therefore ensures that prisoners know at all times that they may well be under surveillance. The effect of this set-up is to "induce in the

inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that ensures the automatic functioning of power” (Foucault, 1979, p. 201). In this way, prisoners “come to operate as if under constant surveillance, taking the role of controlling observer upon themselves. In this way power relations are reproduced, implemented from within the internal position of the subject” (Hook, 2004, p. 225).

In *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1979), power is shown to take the form of surveillance and assessment of individuals, realised in practices of state institutions (such as prisons, schools, the army and the work place) which “discipline the body, mind and emotions, constituting them according to the needs of hierarchical forms of power such as gender or class” (Weedon, 1987, p. 121). As the recipients of such practices, individuals are “endowed with specific perceptions of their identity and potential, which appear to be natural to the subjected individual, rather than a product of diffuse forms of power” (Weedon, 1987, p. 121). The threat of being ‘abnormal’ or ‘unnatural’ keeps people in a perpetual process of self-surveillance and self-discipline to the norm (Weedon, 1987). Through continual self-discipline, each individual becomes a self-policing subject: his or her “own jailor” (Bartky, 1990, p. 65).

Rather than being unified, coherent and centralised, disciplinary power functions in a “diffuse, multiple, polyvalent way throughout the whole social body” (Foucault, 1979, p. 209). The diffuse nature of power renders it largely invisible; and its invisibility is what lends it its force: “Power is only tolerable on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms ... [S]ecrecy ... is indispensable to its operation” (Foucault, 1978, p. 86). Disciplinary power operates through a process of “subtle coercion”, making the exercise of power both more economical and effective (Foucault, 1979, p. 209). Foucault thus presents a model of power that is diffuse, rather than possessed by any one individual or group. However, as Bordo (1993) incisively points out, Foucault’s impersonal or agnostic power:

... does *not* entail that there are no dominant positions, social structures or ideologies emerging from the play of forces; the fact that power is not held by *anyone* does not entail that it is equally held by *all*. It is ‘held’ by no one; but people and groups are positioned differently within it. No one may control the rules of the game. But not

all players on the field are equal. (Bordo, 1993, p. 191, italics in original)

Foucault's concept of disciplinary power offers a useful lens for exploring the subtle mechanics of power between men and women, both in and out of the bedroom. However, as feminists have pointed out, Foucault's framework is pervasively gender-blind, and fails to take into account the *different* effects that power produces on and through the bodies of men and women (Bartky, 1990; Butler, 1990; Grosz, 1994; McNay, 1992). Nonetheless, Foucault's work has been taken up and adapted to serve feminist ends (e.g. Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1988; 1993; Butler, 1990; Gavey, 1992; 1997; Grosz, 1994; Sawicki, 1991). Feminists working within a post-structuralist framework have pointed out the need to highlight how sexuality is deployed through a differential, gendered operation of power: "Disciplinary power may produce 'docile bodies' but there are profound gender differences in the forms this takes with regards to heterosexuality" (Gavey, 1992, p. 327).

En-gendering docile bodies

Foucault treats the body throughout as if it were one, as if the bodily experiences of men and women did not differ ... Where is the account of disciplinary practices that engender the 'docile bodies' of women, bodies more docile than the bodies of men? Foucault ... is blind to those disciplinary practices which produce a modality of embodiment that is peculiarly feminine. To overlook the forms of subjection that engender the feminine body is to perpetuate the silence and powerlessness of those upon whom these disciplines have been imposed. (Bartky, 1990, p. 65)

Bartky (1990) conducts a feminist Foucauldian analysis of the disciplinary practices that produce the 'feminine' body, highlighting the practices of self-discipline that a woman must master in the pursuit of a 'properly feminine' body. These include diet, exercise, and bodily ornamentation, including the application of make-up and selection of clothes. Bartky argues that the disciplinary practices she describes go beyond the demarcation of sexual 'differences' between men and women; rather, she contends, the disciplining of the feminine body serves to construct "a body upon which an inferior status is inscribed" (Bartky, 1990, p. 71). "In the regime of institutionalized heterosexuality woman must make herself 'object and prey' for the

man ... In contemporary patriarchal culture, a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the consciousness of most women" (Bartky, 1990, p. 72). She contends that:

The woman who checks her makeup half a dozen times a day to see if her foundation has caked or her mascara has run, who worries that the wind or rain may spoil her hairdo, who looks frequently to see if her stockings have bagged at the ankle, or who, feeling fat, monitors everything she eats, has become, just as surely as the inmate of the Panopticon, a self-policing subject, a self-committed to relentless self-surveillance. This self-surveillance is an obedience to patriarchy. It is also the reflection in women's consciousness of the fact that *she* is under surveillance in ways that *he* is not, that whatever else she may become, she is importantly a body designed to please and excite. There has been induced in many women, then, in Foucault's words, 'a state of consciousness that assures the automatic functioning of power'. (Bartky, 1990, p. 80).

As in the case of Foucault's model of disciplinary power, "[t]he disciplinary power that inscribes femininity in the female body is everywhere and nowhere; the disciplinarian is everyone and no one in particular" (Bartky, 1990, p. 74). The anonymity of disciplinary power and its wide dispersion creates the impression that the production of femininity is either natural or voluntary, and "serves only to disguise the extent to which the imperative to be 'feminine' serves the interests of domination" (Bartky, 1990, p. 75). Bartky points to the dual character of feminine bodily discipline: this discipline can be socially imposed, and simultaneously/or self-imposed, and sought voluntarily. It is this 'voluntary' component of feminine bodily discipline that makes resistance difficult. As Bartky observes, cultivating a 'properly' feminine body is bound up in the sense of how one is perceived by others, and also what one knows and what one knows how to do. While the imposition of discipline may promote a larger disempowerment, discipline may bring with it a development of a person's powers, providing the individual with a sense of mastery as well as a secure sense of identity. Resisting such discipline thus requires relinquishing a set of well-mastered skills, and can call into question that aspect of personal identity which is tied to the development of a sense of competence.

Gavey (1992) draws parallels between Bartky's analysis of the vigilance of some women over their feminine appearance, and the 'obedience' of some women in their sexual relations with men. She argues that women involved in heterosexual

encounters are also engaged in 'self-surveillance', and are "encouraged to become self-policing subjects who comply with the normative heterosexual narrative scripts which demand our consent and participation irrespective of our sexual desire" (Gavey, 1992, p. 328). Disciplinary power, in this regard, can produce a form of 'obedience' which transcends conscious and deliberate submission, on the part of women, or overt domination on the part of men. Similarly, Holland and Ramazanoglu (1993) find the concepts of disciplinary power and 'docile bodies' a useful tool that allows us to move beyond explaining heterosexual relationships at the level of 'material bodies': as these researchers argue, sexual behaviour is also constituted as discourses of heterosexuality which construct female sexuality as subordinate to male needs, expectations and desires. Women, they find, discipline their bodies, not only to take care of them, but to express their femininity in meeting men's needs. Holland and colleagues (1994a) address, in this framework, what it means for women to resist men's power over their material bodies, in terms of what it means for young women to take control and take care of their bodies in heterosexual encounters. They argue that: "Safer sex is not a matter of rational decision-making between two equal agents, but a complex and unstable negotiation between gendered beings where not only is the masculine privileged over the feminine, but female heterosexuality is socially constructed to support male dominance" (Holland et al., 1994a, p. 65). Accordingly, "[i]f heterosexual women are to be able to control their bodies, they must come to terms with the ways in which the social construction of masculinity and femininity estranges women from their bodies" (Holland et al., 1994a, p. 61).

Framing resistance

Although the subject in post-structuralism is socially constructed in discursive practices, she none the less exists as a thinking, feeling subject and social agent, capable of resistance and innovations produced out of the clash between contradictory subject positions and practices. She is also a subject able to reflect upon the discursive positions available to her and the society in which she lives, and able to choose from the options available. (Weedon, 1987, p. 125)

While a post-structuralist account theorises sexuality as socially constructed through discourse, this should not be taken as meaning that young women's sexuality is passively moulded by discourse (Holland et al., 1990). In *The History of Sexuality*,

Volume One, Foucault (1978) argues that there is never a position that can escape power, as one can never step outside of discourse; however, he goes on to clarify that “we’re never trapped by power; it’s always possible to modify its hold in determined conditions and following a precise strategy” (p. 95). Following this, Sawicki (1991) suggests the potential of Foucauldian theory for feminist resistance: “For Foucault, discourse ... is a site of conflict and contestation. Thus, women can adopt and adapt language to their own ends. They may not have total control over it, but then neither do men” (p. 1).

Individuals are not considered passive within such a framework: rather, “they are active and have ‘choice’ when positioning themselves in relation to various discourses” (Gavey, 1997, p. 54). Or, as Weedon (1987) phrases this, “[i]ndividuals are both the *site* and *subject* of discursive struggle for their identities” (p. 97). In this regard, young women are actively engaged in constructing their femininity and sexuality: they can identify and conform to traditional discursive constructions of femininity, or they can resist, reject and challenge them (Holland et al., 1990).

Foucault and his post-structuralist followers do not see women as having to liberate their material bodies from power; rather, transforming political relations can be thought of as induced “through the production of new discourses, and so new forms of power and the self” (Ramazanoglu, 1993, p. 24). Feminists have argued that one “precise strategy” that can be adopted in the reconstruction of heterosexuality, and the re-scripting of safer sex includes the embodiment of female desire: and this requires a discourse which centres women’s sexuality, constructs female sexuality as positive, and acknowledges female sexual desire (e.g. Holland et al., 1990; 1991; 1994a; Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe & Thomson, 1992; 2003; Holland, Ramazanoglu & Thomson, 1996; Kippax, Crawford, Waldby & Benton, 1990; Hollway, 1996; Shefer & Foster, 2001; Wood & Foster, 1995). Holland and colleagues (1994a) argue that “[s]afer sex requires that women embody their own desires; that they are informed about their bodies and the risks they can run; that they know about the possibilities of desires and passions, recognise what these feel like, and are able to value them (p. 61-62). Potts (2002) contends that, “in Foucault’s terms, this involves activating the female body as a site of resistance rather than maintaining it simply as a target of power” (p. 45).

Nonetheless, the embodiment of an alternative, more active female sexuality can only exist with a concomitant shift in male sexuality – which requires destabilising discourses which privilege male sexuality (Potts, 2002; Wilton & Aggleton, 1991). Gavey (1992, p. 330) reminds us that it would be “naïve” to believe that an individual woman will achieve ‘liberation’ by positioning herself in a more active discourse on female sexuality in an otherwise misogynist material context; to forget the material conditions of women’s lives - such as brute violence, and socio-economic disadvantages – is “to move onto the slippery slope of victim-blaming”.

Empirical literature review: Gender, power and heterosexuality

Research attending to social constructions of sexuality and gender views the sexual ‘choices’ available to the adolescent girl as intimately related to the discourses available to her for making meaning out of her experiences with her body and her relationships. Specifically, an important body of literature is pointing towards the manner whereby gendered constructions of female and male (adolescent) sexuality undermine adolescent girls’ sexual health. Studies have revealed that dominant cultural conceptions of female sexuality as passive, devoid of desire, and subordinate to male needs and desires make it difficult for young women to actively negotiate either their safety or pleasure in heterosexual relationships. This body of literature will be reviewed, in brief, below.

Male-defined constructions of sexuality

Many studies have found that female sexual identity for heterosexual women is discursively constructed in a context which defines sex in terms of men’s sexual drives and needs. Women tend to be defined as objects of male sexual desire, which is popularly constructed as overwhelming, uncontrollable and urgent (Gilfoyle, Wilson & Brown, 1993; Kippax et al., 1990; Miles, 1997; Shefer & Foster, 2001; Strebel, 1993; Wood & Foster, 1995). This construction has coined the label the ‘male sex drive’ discourse (Hollway, 1984; 1989). In practice, in South Africa and elsewhere,

this discourse justifies a form of male sexuality that rests upon having impulsive (and thus unprotected) sex with multiple women (Eaton et al., 2003). Social constructions that promote the idea that men 'need' and are ever-ready for sex constrain the potential for female negotiation, by limiting opportunities for young women to either refuse or negotiate safe sex (Eaton et al., 2003; Moore & Rosenthal, 1992; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 1993; Wilton & Aggleton, 1991).

The only positive – and socially legitimised - identities available to young heterosexual women tend to be linked with their social relationships with men as girlfriends, wives, or objects of love (Holland et al., 1990; Shefer & Foster, 2001). There are certain social dangers associated with active, pleasure-seeking expressions of female sexuality. Young women who are invested in preserving a positive social reputation tend to adhere to social definitions of sexual encounters as initiated by men, against female resistance: as those who actively seek sex can be subject to negative labelling and a spoiled reputation (Holland et al., 1990; 1994a; 1996; Shefer & Foster, 2001). Young women may avoid purchasing or carrying condoms, or introducing these in sexual encounters, and may make little effort to gain knowledge of their partners' sexual histories, as this would require admission – to themselves and society – that they 'plan' to engage in sex (Holland et al., 1990; 1991; Ingham, Woodcock & Stenner, 1991; Wilton & Aggleton, 1991; Wood & Foster, 1995).

Young women's talk about heterosexual relationships suggests an inextricable link between love and sex, love both legitimating sex and serving as a metaphor for desire (Lees, 1993; Moore & Rosenthal, 1998; Thompson, 1984):

Romance and sex are snarled in teenage girls' discourse, if not inextricably, at least sufficiently so that taking them together and apart is essential to understanding the train of thought. Romance, for example, figures in teenage conversation as a euphemism or metaphor for sex; as an introductory code word signaling permission for a discussion of sex; as a wholly separate category; or as an amalgam of relationship, passion, sex, and desire. It is easier to point out the fusion than to try to take the terms apart. (Thompson, 1984, p. 354-355)

Many young women participating in a British study (Holland et al., 1990) reportedly viewed sex as something which you do only if you love someone, with love

seemingly having taken the place of marriage as a justification for sex. As a number of international studies report, the fusion of love/romance and sex produces vulnerability for young women and constrains their ability to actively negotiate sex and sexual safety (Holland et al., 1990; Jackson, 2001). Holland and colleagues (1990) find that the social pressure upon young women to define their relationships as 'loving' and 'trusting' (as a means of legitimating sex) encourages young women to invest premature trust in their partners, and therefore a non-use of condoms. Similarly, South African studies have found that in relationships which are considered 'serious', trust and fidelity tend to be assumed, and are negotiated in terms of an idea of trust that is predicated on not asking questions of an intimate nature, including partner history or sexual status, and not asking for or using condoms (Dlala, Hiner, Qwana & Lurie, 2001; Levine & Ross, 2002; Tillotson & Maharaj, 2001; Wood & Foster, 1995).

International and South African studies have found that young women tend to privilege their partners in decision-making surrounding condom-use. Young women fear losing their partners by introducing condoms and fear condoms may limit his pleasure (Holland et al., 1990; 1992; Varga & Makubalo, 1996; Wood & Foster, 1995). This scenario is bound up in young women's definition of sex in terms of love, romance and a relationship, which leads them to view sexual practice in terms of men's needs with men's pleasure being paramount in the sexual encounter. Gavey and McPhillips (1999) find that discourses of traditional heterosexuality and romance (which constitute the male as the active, leading partner and the female as the passive, responsive partner, with the implicit promise of a man's love and protection in return) find that, for a woman, to take control of a sexual situation – if only to introduce a condom – involve actions that potentially disrupt her feminine sexual identity, and could threaten the potential rewards she may expect in the form of love, romance and protection. Wilton and Aggleton (1991) argue that, "to purchase and carry condoms is, for a woman, to challenge the patriarchal definition of her sexuality as innately responsive to male initiative – as reactive rather than proactive. Such a challenge demands more than assertiveness training for women. It demands a paradigmatic shift around the nexus of gender identity and sexual identity" (p. 155).

Coercive and violent practices

In a British study (Holland et al., 1990; 1992), female informants reported quite frequently being coerced by men whose objective is to have penetrative sex. These pressures ranged from mild persuasion to giving way sexually or to accept unprotected intercourse, through varying degrees of force, to assault and rape. Similarly, South African studies have found that violence and coercion, including verbal threats and coerced sex, are common features of young people's heterosexual relationships (MacPhail & Campbell, 2001; Varga & Makubalo, 1996; Wood & Jewkes, 2001; Wood, Maforah & Jewkes, 1998).

The conflation of sex with love and romance, and constructions of conventional feminine sexuality as passive and responsive to a partner's needs, means that (young) women have difficulty naming sexual coercion or rape when it happens within the context of a romantic relationship (Gavey, 1992; Thompson, 1990; Wood et al., 1998). African studies report the internalisation of violence against women as a norm amongst both young women (Wood et al., 1998) and men (Wood & Jewkes, 2001; Barker & Ricardo, 2005). Wood and colleagues (1998) found that some young women perceive violent assault as an expression of love, with assault perceived as a male strategy for "getting you to love him" (p. 238). Similarly, a study in Uganda (see Barker & Ricardo, 2005) found that young men believe that a woman will think a man does not love her if he does not hit her. In studies conducted in South Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa more generally, the most common motives for using violence against a women is infidelity – suspected or proven – or a scenario wherein a women refused sex (Abrahams, Jewkes, Hoffman & Laubsher, 2004; Barker & Ricardo, 2005; Wood & Jewkes, 2001; Wood et al., 1998). A woman's refusal to submit to sexual demands can signify, in men's eyes, that she has had other sexual partners and has been 'worn out', and violent responses a way of reinforcing male control and ownership (Wood, et al., 1998). A review of South African research (Vetten & Bhana, 2001) draws numerous links between gender-based violence and women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

Developmental context of heterosexual power dynamics

Young people's constructions of sexuality and heterosexual relationships are powerfully shaped by social and sexual inequalities disseminated during childhood and adolescence (Shefer & Potgieter, 2006), and the power imbalances characteristic among adults have many of their roots in childhood and adolescence (Weiss et al., 2000). Much of the literature suggests that girls are socialised into their womanhood in negative terms. Studies, both locally and internationally, have found that sex education for young women is frequently couched within a 'protective discourse', whereby young women are constructed as vulnerable to 'dangerous' male sexuality (Fine, 1988; Holland et al., 1994a; Lesch, 2000; Lesch & Kruger, 2005; Thomson & Scott, 1991; Wood et al., 1998). As Fine (1988) observes, the adolescent girl, "[e]ducated primarily as the potential victim of male sexuality ... represents no subject in her own right" (p. 30).

Better safe than sorry is still a dominant caution. Women – socialized by their mothers to keep their dresses down, their pants up, and their bodies away from strangers – come to experience their sexual impulses as dangerous. (Vance, 1984, p. 4)

Empirical work on adolescent girls' experiences of sexual desire (Tolman, 1994; 2000; Tolman & Szalacha, 1999) finds that cultural contexts that render girls' sexuality problematic and dangerous divert them from the possibilities of empowerment through their sexual desire. Thompson (1984; 1990) collected 400 girls' narratives about sexuality, in which girls' desire seemed frequently absent or not relevant to the terms of their sexual relationships. The minority of girls who spoke of sexual pleasure voiced more sexual agency than girls whose experiences were devoid of pleasure. These girls relayed how their mothers had encouraged expectations that challenged the gendered status quo in heterosexual relationships.

Mitchell, Walsh and Larkin (2004) point out that the social construction of age can contribute to the vulnerability of young people to HIV infection. They find that young South Africans who are at the age of experimenting with sex and who are most in need of information about sexuality and HIV/AIDS are often considered and referred to as 'children' – innocent and unknowing about sexuality – and thus not requiring or

having the right to relevant information about their bodies and sexuality. Mitchell and colleagues critique the 'politics of innocence' in the age of AIDS, contending that the construction of young people as 'innocent' can put their health on the line. However, other studies suggest that the 'politics of innocence' are not gender-neutral. Weiss and colleagues (2000) argue that, while previous research has identified a lack of information and services as a factor that influences sexual risk amongst the youth, these factors are not gender-neutral. Studies (Weiss & Rao Gupta, 1998; Weiss et al., 1996; 2000) conducted across a number of developing countries, including South Africa, find that young women *in particular* lack basic knowledge about their bodies, reproduction and sexuality. This lack of knowledge is supported by societal norms which dictate that 'good' girls should not know about sex. These studies find that girls are often reluctant to seek information for fear of being suspected of being sexually active and risking stigmatisation or a spoiled reputation. This needs to be understood within a context of immense social pressure faced by girls to maintain an image of passivity, virginity and naiveté, regardless of the true extent of their experience. Consequently, girls can experience reluctance towards taking precautions against HIV "because this implies assuming an outward appearance of a sexually active life which is not congruent with traditional norms of conduct for girl" (Weiss et al., 1996, p. 9). Societal emphasis upon virginity, for young women, and its associations with innocence and ignorance, arguably leads to a failure to provide young women with information, services and access to the tools of HIV prevention.

The articulation of gender with other forms of power inequalities

Women's lack of negotiation in heterosexual relationships has to be understood within the broader context of unequal gender relations, and the way in which these intersect with other forms of power inequalities, such as class, age and 'race'. At a local and international level, there is a large body of work in 'disadvantaged' countries that places women's economic subordination as a critical force in gender inequality, female subordination in heterosexual relationships, and their consequent predisposition to HIV infection (Abdool Karim, 2005; WHO, 1994). With the feminisation of poverty, particularly evident in Africa, women are made especially

vulnerable to HIV infection through the intersection of economic and gender power inequalities.

Given the racialised social stratification that still characterises South Africa, problems associated with poverty mostly affect Black youth (Eaton et al., 2003). The articulation of gender with age positions young, poor women as particularly disempowered within heterosexual relationships, and thus vulnerable to HIV infection and abuse. South African studies have highlighted the widespread nature of coercive or unprotected sexuality linked with economic factors such as poverty and financial dependence.

Poverty and women's limited access to economic opportunities may increase the likelihood of their engaging in subsistence or transactional sex. In the case of survival or 'subsistence' sex, young women in dire economic circumstances agree to sexual relationships with older men (known as the 'sugar daddy' phenomenon) in exchange for financial support (Adams & Marshall, 1998). In the context of such sexual exchanges, sex tends to happen on a man's terms, which often means without a condom (Abdool Karim, 1998; Adams & Marshall, 1998; MacPhail & Campbell, 2001). Other studies have found that young women do not always exchange sex for survival purposes, but also for items which confer status. This has coined the term 'transactional sex' (LeClerc-Madlala, 2003). Transactional sex – often with multiple, older partners – is geared towards conspicuous consumption, rather than subsistence, as young women pursue images and ideals largely created by the media and globalisation (Delius & Walker, 2002; Hunter, 2002; LeClerc-Madlala, 2002; 2003). Within these studies, women are represented as having 'agency' to the extent that they 'choose' partners who are able to further their acquisition of 'modern' commodities, including cars, cash and cell phones, and assert their power and agency by exploiting men's ability to meet consumerist needs. Women have also started to take up multiple, concurrent sexual partners as a reaction to men's previous monopoly on 'enjoying life' and sex in particular, constructing this as a 'modern' activity. Researchers argue that relationships in which sexual exchanges take place are not inevitably sites in which women become 'victims' of gender inequality (Hunter, 2002; LeClerc-Madlala, 2002; 2003): "women typically see multiple boyfriends as a means

of controlling their lives, rather than acts of desperation ... although the two of course are linked” (Hunter, 2002, p. 112).

Socio-economic status is also reportedly related to the likelihood of young women experiencing physical abuse and sexual coercion within relationships. One study of South African high school learners (Whitefield, 1999) found that adolescents with low socio-economic status (SES) experienced three times as much physical abuse and four times as much attempted and actual rape than did adolescents with high SES. Thus, the sexual domination of young women by their partners, discussed earlier, appears to happen more in poor community. This study also found that poverty may be linked with cultural discourses that support an unequal distribution of sexual power between men and women: reportedly, adolescent girls from advantaged communities rejected sexist beliefs about relationships, while girls with lower SES supported these beliefs to the same extent as their male peers.

The complex intersection of gender, age and class (which, in turn, is strongly correlated with ‘race’ in South Africa) is becoming increasingly evident in the way in which heterosex is being enacted in many South African communities.

Evidence of resistance

A promising trend evident in the research agenda is the shift from an exclusive focus upon how male privilege and power is produced and reproduced within young people’s heterosexual relationships, towards an examination of instances wherein both young women and men resist traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Such a focus is important, as it is illustrative of young people’s agency, and moves away from casting young men as sexual predators, and young women as inevitable sexual victims. Literature derived from developed countries has paid more explicit attention to contestation of traditional gender roles than that in South Africa, and developing countries more generally (MacPhail & Campbell, 2001). One South African study (MacPhail & Campbell, 2001) which attended to variation amongst adolescents found that, running counter to stereotypes about male dominance, a minority of male participants heatedly defended the rights of women in sexual relationships, and challenged the idea of coercive sex, while a minority of female participants spoke of

successfully fending off coercive sexual advances from males, or expressed admiration towards those who took up active strategies of resistance.

Conclusion

This chapter has elaborated the theoretical frames within which this study is located, drawing heavily upon (feminist) post-structuralist theorising of (1) language, power and subjectivity and (2) (hetero)sexuality, gender, power and the body. Following this, an overview of findings drawn from empirical studies of gender, power and heterosexuality, conducted in South Africa and internationally was presented, which proceeds from a social constructionist framework of sexuality, consistent with the theoretical framing of this study. This material provides the theoretical and empirical starting points for this dissertation.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This chapter addresses issues pertaining to the research design, sampling, data production, transcription and modes of analysis.

Feminist research methodologies

This study is situated broadly within a feminist methodological framework. Feminist research developed out of an epistemological critique of dominant positivist – and masculinist – conceptions of knowledge, and their ensuing research agenda (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor & Tindall, 1994). As such, a key principle of feminist research methodology involves foregrounding women's voices and women's experiences, through a variety of methods and social scientific practices (Boonzaier & Shefer, 2006). Feminist post-structuralists are, however, critical of the idea of a unitary 'woman's experience' or identity; such a perspective, within which this study is grounded, wards against essentialising female experience and identity, and gives attention to differences and inequalities amongst women.

Traditional psychological research tends to maintain a strict line of division between researcher and subject – with 'subject' actually meaning 'object' (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). I dispense with the term research 'subjects' for this reason and utilise, instead, the term 'participants'. At other times, I refer to the participants as 'young women' or 'girls'. While this latter term may be regarded as disempowering or demeaning (as opposed to the term 'young women', which I employ at times), this is the term that the participants most commonly used to refer to themselves and their peers: and, as I

wish to prioritise the voices and perspectives of the participants in the study, I centralise their own terminology and labelling, rather than imposing my own.

Study setting and sample

This research project was conducted in the Fish Hoek Valley on the Cape Peninsula, located on the southern edge of the city of Cape Town, South Africa. More than ten years after apartheid, the area remains racially segregated, with distinct 'white' areas (the suburbs of Fish Hoek itself), the 'coloured' area of Ocean View, and the 'African' area of Masiphumelele. The economic stratification of the entire area is strongly demarcated along racial lines, with the coloured and African areas being predominantly poor and working class in composition, while the Fish Hoek suburbs are relatively more affluent. While it is customary to refer to the entire area as 'Fish Hoek' or the 'Fish Hoek Valley', I am reluctant to follow this practice, which explicitly privileges the name of the 'white' town, and also invites confusion between the area as a whole and the 'white' town within it. Henceforth, where necessary, I refer to the entire area as the 'research site'.

I am mindful of the fact that the use of racial categories in South African scholarship is controversial (Swartz, Gibson & Gelman, 2002). However, leading South African psychological researchers argue that these socially and historically constructed racial categories in this country carry important social meanings (Swartz et al., 2002), and that the use of such categories is important in that it serves to highlight the impact that apartheid had on specific groups (Shefer, Strebel & Foster, 2000). In this dissertation (following Swartz et al., 2002), I use the term 'African' to refer to indigenous South Africans who generally speak indigenous languages such as Xhosa, Zulu and Sotho. 'Coloured' refers to South Africans of diverse and mixed racial origins, most of whom speak Afrikaans and/or English. 'Black' is used in the generic sense for all South Africans disenfranchised under Apartheid (and includes Africans and coloureds). 'White' refers to South Africans of European ancestry who were enfranchised under apartheid.

Girls who were already participating in an ongoing ethnographic youth research project in the area (initiated by the Centre for Social Science Research, based at the

University of Cape Town) were informed about this study. I met with those who expressed interest in participating and, after confirming their willingness to participate, asked these girls to recruit friends or peers who were enrolled in their high school grade, and living in the same area. They were encouraged to invite peers who would feel comfortable discussing matters concerning sex and sexuality in a group environment, as well as on an individual basis. Through this process, I generated a purposive sample of three broadly-defined 'groups' of 6 to 8 girls, with a total of 20 study participants. When the data-collection phase of the research project began, the participants were all enrolled in their final year of high school (grade 12).

The Fish Hoek 'group' comprised of 6 white girls, the Masiphumelele 'group' comprised of 8 African girls, and the Ocean View 'group' comprised of 6 coloured girls. The three groups of participants converged in terms of age, gender and school grade attainment/enrolment, and diverged in terms of 'race' and class. The aim of this sampling strategy was to produce a socially-diverse sample, such that issues of culture, race and class could be attended to within the study. While all of the participants were proficient in English, the African participants were first-language isiXhosa-speakers, and a number of the coloured participants were bilingual (English and Afrikaans) or first-language Afrikaans-speakers.

Criteria that I did not purposively select for included the 'sexual status' (sexually active/abstinent) and sexual orientation of the participants. This was due to the fact that I was relying upon a peer-recruitment strategy (and did not feel it was appropriate for the 'recruiters' to be required to access this information of their peers) and because this study was focussed less upon 'what' young women are 'doing' (their behaviours) and with whom, but their subjective experiences of sexuality. Ultimately, the study sample comprised of 20 (self-identified) heterosexual girls, 10 of whom were sexually abstinent (never had sex) and 10 of whom were sexually active (had had sex at least once). Although not equally distributed across the racial and class grouping (see Figure 1., p. 35), this probably had more to do with the non-random selection process, than to do with group specificities.

Participation was entirely voluntary, based on a response to a cover letter that outlined the study, and the nature of the experiences the participants would be required to

discuss. Within the cover letter, I stressed the right of each participant to refuse to answer any questions. Confidentiality, anonymity and privacy were assured and maintained in relation to the participants. In the interest of this, I utilise pseudonyms - see Figure 1, for reference - when presenting the data. Any names referred to by the participants, during focus groups and interviews, have also been substituted with pseudonyms. In instances wherein the participants were under the age of 18 years, parental consent was also obtained. (See Appendices A to D for English and isiXhosa cover letters and informed consent forms.)

Figure 1. Participant details

Neighbourhood	Code	N	Participant Pseudonyms	Age [yrs]	Ave. Age [Yrs]	Age range [Yrs]	Sexual status	
							Sexually Abstinent	Sexually Active
Fish Hoek	FH	6	Sally	16	18.2	16 – 22	X	
			Jane	17				X
			Kate	17			X	
			Lisa	18			X	
			Helen	19			X	
			Laura	22				X
							N = 4	N = 2
Masiphumelele	MP	8	Phumla	17	17.9	17 – 19		X
			Dudu	17				X
			Nomhle	17				X
			Xoliswa	18				X
			Zuki	18				X
			Zodwa	18				X
			Thandi	19				X
			Somi	19				X
							N = 0	N = 8
Ocean View	OV	6	Faiza	16	17.2	16 – 18	X	
			Geraldine	17			X	
			Karen	17			X	
			Natalie	17			X	
			Chantelle	18			X	
			Nerissa	18			X	
							N = 6	N = 0
TOTAL		20			17.8	16-22	N = 10	N = 10

Data production

As sexual identities are often privately-held, are not clearly observable, and often not consciously or clearly accessible to the participants themselves (Reddy, 2005), a variety of methods were used to generate data on the participants' sexual subjectivities. These included focus group discussions, individual 'work-bookings' and (semi-structured, individually-tailored) individual interviews. In alignment with feminist research with adolescent girls (Brown & Gilligan, 1992), my approach towards data production emphasised collaboration and relationship-building, rather than maintaining a strict line of division between researcher-subject. In order to facilitate the participants' level of comfort and privacy, the focus groups and individual interviews were conducted in spaces chosen by the participants, and were conducted in an informal and conversational manner, over refreshments. The focus group discussions and individual interviews were conducted over a six month time period in 2005. Each 'group' of participants was involved in 1-2 focus group discussion/s, and each individual participant was involved in 1-2 individual interview/s. Focus groups discussions and individual interviews lasted between 1 ½ and 2 ½ hours long. Participants who were not mother-tongue English-speakers, or bilingual, were given the option of a translator so that interviews could be conducted in a language of their choice. All but one participant [Thandi, MP; see Fig. 1, p. 35] chose to proceed without a translator present, and in English. All focus groups and individual interviews were tape-recorded (with the consent of the participants) and fully transcribed (and translated into English, where necessary).

Focus groups

The choice of focus groups had both conceptual and practical relevance within this study, and the contextual and non-hierarchical character of this method renders this an amenable tool for feminist research (Wilkinson, 1999).

First, the focus group method had conceptual relevance within the current study, given that it is a *contextual* method, in that it avoids focussing on the individual devoid of social context, or separate from interactions with others (Wilkinson, 1999).

As MacPhail and Campbell (2001) point out, the focus group method has conceptual importance within a study that conceptualises sexuality as a socially constructed and negotiated phenomenon. Tapping into interpersonal communication, which the focus group method allows, is important in its potential to highlight dominant cultural values and group norms surrounding sexuality (Kitzinger, 1995).

Second, my choice to begin the data production process with focus group discussions was rooted in the concern that one-on-one interviews surrounding sexuality could be intimidating for teenagers, and the idea that the group process might provide peer support in discussing these issues (see Harrison, Xaba, Kunene & Ntuli, 2001). Sexuality, and children's and adolescent sexuality in particular, is generally considered a 'sensitive' research topic (Farquhar & Das, 1999; Lee & Renzetti, 1993), and the focus group method has been found to be amenable to sensitive areas of research (Farquhar & Das, 1999; Kitzinger, 1995). Focus groups are a *non-hierarchical* method, in that they shift the balance of power away from the researcher towards the research participants (Wilkinson, 1999). The focus group method enables research participants to explore issues of importance to them, in their own vocabulary, to express their own thoughts and feelings, generate their own questions, determine their own agendas and pursue their own priorities (Kitzinger, 1995; Wilkinson, 1999). Additionally, focus groups can facilitate open discussion around topics - such as sexuality - which are considered 'taboo', in that the less inhibited members of the group can 'break the ice' for shyer participants (Kitzinger, 1995). The focus group method has added appeal, as participants can provide mutual support in expressing views and feelings that are common to their group, but which they consider deviate from mainstream culture, or the assumed culture of the researcher, particularly when researching taboo topics or experiences (Kitzinger, 1995). This method could thus be harnessed to address some of the potential power differentials between myself, the interviewer (a white, middle-class, female researcher, in my mid-twenties) , and the participants - stemming from racial, cultural, class and age-related differences, as well as standard researcher-researched power differentials.

The focus group schedule is briefly outlined in the following paragraph, and is presented in greater depth in Appendix E. I began each focus group by introducing myself and the study to the participants. This was followed by a 'climate-setting'

exercise of getting to know one another, establishing boundaries and rules (such as respect, tolerance and confidentiality), procedural issues, and answering questions from the group. Discussions were initiated with an 'ice-breaking' exercise, wherein the participants were invited to write down, anonymously, on slips of paper that were provided, as many words that come to mind relating to the word 'sex'. The slips of paper were then collaged onto a large board, for all to see. The aim of this exercise was both to encourage openness and freedom of expression, as well as draw attention to the multiple meanings that sex can have. The ice-breaking exercise was followed by a brief work-book exercise (see Appendix F for a workbook prototype), wherein the participants were encouraged to map out the relationships, activities and spaces that feature significantly in their daily lives. This exercise was used to prompt a discussion about the different types of 'sexual messages' (discourses) – circumscribing what is sexually acceptable, expected and appropriate – that young women receive in the various contexts of their daily lives. This discussion included a focus on gender and power. Next, the discussion was directed upon young women's sexual decision-making and practices: this included debate about what motivates young people to become involved in heterosexual relationships and sex, who controls sexual initiation, and decision-making around and control over contraceptive use. If the issue did not arise spontaneously, I prompted discussion about sex and 'embodiment' for young women: i.e. discussions about physical or bodily experiences, including pleasure and pain. Focus groups ended with a general discussion about the questions girls have surrounding sex, and whether they have access to answers about these; some of the challenges sex poses in the lives of young women; and the positive aspects of sex in the experiences of young women; and reflections upon the discussion itself.

The discussions were lively, with much interruption and contestation taking place. The choice to conduct the discussions with pre-existing friendship groups was advantageous in that it provided a space wherein I could observe the participants in interaction with one another in somewhat 'natural' terms, and in that they could relate each other's comments to shared incidents, relationships and activities in their daily lives (see Kitzinger, 1995). In the case of one of the groups [OV; see Fig. 1, p. 35], the participants were so engaged in conversation and debate that, upon their request, I agreed to set up a second focus group discussion.

One of the limitations attributed to the focus group method is that it tends to encourage normative responses and exaggerated conclusions, and can silence individual voices of dissent (Alexander & Uys, 2002; Harrison et al., 2001; Kitzinger, 1995). Furthermore, as Michell (1999) observes, while focus groups offer a space wherein participants can 'tell it like it is', individual interviews provide more room for 'telling how it feels'. Personal feelings and experiences are particularly likely to be suppressed where participants have ongoing social relations which might be compromised by public disclosure (Michell, 1999). These potential limitations of the focus group method were addressed by providing the participants with individual workbooks (Appendix F), which provided a private space wherein they could document personal thoughts and opinions that they did not feel comfortable voicing in the group discussion, and by following the group discussions with individual interviews. The focus groups played an important role in preparing the participants for the individual interviews. While some of the participants had initially expressed reservation about one-on-one interviews prior to the focus group discussions, all expressed an eagerness to continue and deepen the research relationship by participating in individual interviews after the group discussions had taken place.

Individual interviews

While I had originally designed a generic semi-structured interview schedule, the focus groups yielded insight into many issues that were not addressed within this schedule. Before beginning the individual interviews, I transcribed the focus group material, and did a basic analysis of (1) the key themes and debates that emerged within the group; and (2) the personal views and feelings expressed by each individual participant within the group, and noted in her individual workbook. From this, I constructed a semi-structured interview schedule that was individually-tailored for each participant, which could follow and extend upon the debates and views of the discussion in which she had participated, as well as her personally-expressed opinions within this context. The individual interviews were designed in an open-ended manner, and were geared towards yielding sensitive emotional content that I felt was sometimes absent within the focus group discussions. The individual interviews probed the participants' personal decision-making surrounding sex (for example, the

decision to abstain or, alternatively, to have sex), their personal experiences of sexual initiation (where relevant), and personal fears, anxieties and desires in the realm of their sexuality.

To explore these experiences in depth, and in a participant-led manner, I drew heavily upon Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) *free association narrative interview* method. This method synthesises the biographical interpretative method with a free association method used in clinical interviews. The idea behind this method is that, by "narrativising" topics (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 35) – by asking open-ended questions, and eliciting stories - one can gain insight into concerns and issues that would not surface in a highly structured, question-and-answer dominated interview schedule. This involves turning questions about given topics into "story-telling invitations" (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 35).

While drawing heavily upon the principles of the biographical method – which probes people's life-stories – an interest in specific events and experiences (i.e. those pertaining to sexuality) requires the use of what has been termed "focused interviews" (Mischler, as cited in Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 36). I found this to be a useful means of re-addressing issues that had emerged in the focus groups discussions in a personalised manner. For example, during the focus groups, I probed the participants about what prompts adolescent girls (in general) to have sex. In the individual interview, on the other hand, I asked the participants to tell me about their personal experiences of sexual initiation (or alternatively, their choices to abstain from sex). In some instances, I presented the participants with far less structured "story-telling invitations", such as 'Can you tell me about a time when you have felt anxious or worried in relation to a sexual issue or experience? Can you tell me about a difficult decision you have had to make? Can you tell me about a positive sexual experience?'. In some cases, the participants were resistant to such invitations; in such instances, I re-framed the questions to de-centre the participant herself: for example, 'Can you tell me about someone you know – e.g. a friend, classmate, mother etc. – who has had a negative experience / difficult decision in her sexual experiences or relationships?'. Often these stories – centred upon the experiences of other girls and women – yielded important insight into the participants' personal concerns, and opened the way for more intimate exchanges.

The young women spoke in a strikingly open manner about their sexuality, and lives more generally, and interviews were often emotionally-laden, as young women spoke of their frustrations, anxieties, anger, fears, disappointments, voiced their hopes and ambitions, and struggled to articulate their desires and pleasures. The intimate revelations that took place during individual interviews were a product of continued informal interaction and relationship-building with the young women who participated in the study: which took place during car journeys to and from interviews; talks over coffee in the local cafés; being invited inside the homes of the participants to meet parents, grandparents, siblings and extended family; the (many, and expensive) cell phone conversations – which were initially a means of making arrangements, but became, more importantly, part of my deepening relationship with the participants.

The analytical approach

The analytical process was an ongoing one, rather than beginning only after the focus groups and interviews were conducted and transcribed. One of the features of the interviewing style I adopted centred upon sharing my own observations and analytical insights and reflections with the participants during the interview process, and seeking the participants' responses to these reflections. Gavey and McPhillips (1999, p. 355) find that giving the participants the opportunity to respond to analytical insights as they evolve during the research can (1) can work as an interview technique to promote additional reflection by the interview participant and generate productive discussion in areas that one might not otherwise have researched, and (2) help to enrich and refine the process of one's analysis and strengthen one's confidence in some thematic directions, while dispensing with others. As Gavey and McPhillips stress, the success of this interactive style of interviewing is dependent upon creating an interview environment in which the participant is able to openly disagree with the interviewer. The young women participating in this study were strikingly forthright and open in voicing both consent as well as outright disagreement with my tentative analyses, which facilitated this process.

As noted, I transcribed the focus group material personally prior to conducting the individual interviews. I made a concerted effort to minimise the time frame between

each interview and its transcription, in order to preserve some of the emotional tone and experience of the interview. Transcribing the focus group and interview material personally was a time-consuming task, but nonetheless a worthwhile one. As Potter and Wetherell (1987) note, “[t]he idea that transcription is ‘simply putting the words down on paper’ is very far from reality” (p. 165). Transcription is a “constructive” activity, and the transcription process stood as an important analytic step in making sense of the data, and a pathway into a close reading of the body of discourse before me (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 165). Through conducting the transcription process as the data collection proceeded (rather than postponing this until after all the focus group and interview material had been collected), I found myself becoming more attuned to the discursive constructions featuring in the interviews, and more adept in guiding the interviews in a way that followed the discursive pathways and contradictions that structured the accounts.

The style of discourse analysis employed for the purposes of this study is influenced by feminist post-structuralist theory, and draws upon Foucauldian concepts of discourse and subjectivity elaborated in chapters one and two. Discursive research can be broadly divided into two categories (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999): one that contextualises the text in the micro-context of conversation and debate (e.g. Potter & Wetherell, 1987), and another that contextualises text in a macro-context of institutions, material power relations and ideologies (e.g. Parker, 1992). The latter ‘category’ of discourse analysis was employed for the purpose of this research project, drawing specifically upon Parker’s (1992) elaboration of Foucauldian discourse analysis, which adheres with the feminist post-structuralist framework within which this study is located. Such an analysis allows one to see how discourses ‘live’ across, and transcend the specific or ‘micro’ contexts in which they are deployed to serve particular ideological functions (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

As Gavey (1997) notes, there are no ‘recipes’ or ‘formulae’ for analysing discourse. Nonetheless, Parker (1992) provides a useful set of strategies for analysing discourse, which guided this analysis. The first guiding principle that Parker posits as essential to a discourse analysis includes the recognition that *a discourse is realised in texts* and, given the post-structuralist assertion that discourses constitute subjective experience, it is necessary to treat experience as text. Post-structuralist approaches to discourse

analysis are “suspicious both of claims to reveal a world outside language and of claims that we can experience ourselves outside of language” (Burman & Parker, 1993, p. 6). Potter and Wetherell (1987) hold that the common factor to all forms of discourse analysis is that “[p]articipants’ discourse or social texts are approached *in their own right* and not as a secondary route to things ‘beyond the text’ like attitudes, events or cognitive processes. Discourse is treated as a potent, action-oriented medium” (p. 160, emphasis in original). From a post-structuralist perspective, language constitutes subjectivity. In this regard, individual’s self-reports (i.e. the participants’ talk surrounding their sexuality) are examples of this constitution (Gavey, 1997). Gavey (1997) makes two clarifying points in this regard: first, the accounts of those who we research are considered to be discursive constructions, rather than faithful representations of their ‘true’ experiences and, second, one’s understanding or reading of the research data, as researcher, is controlled by one’s own location within various discourses.

Parker’s (1992) guiding principles concerning discourse analysis include the points that a discourse is about objects and contains subjects. A discourse is about objects, and discourse analysis is about *discourses* as objects. Thus, a discourse analysis involves describing the objects that are referred to in talk, and then treating these references to objects (the talk itself, or the discourse) as an object. As Parker (1992) notes, “[t]he object that a discourse refers to may have an independent reality outside of discourse, but is given *another* reality by discourse” (p. 9, emphasis in original). Parker’s guidelines to discourse analysis emphasise Foucault’s interest in subjectification: “How do individuals come to experience and act upon themselves as subjects? How are subjects recruited into particular forms of action?” (Wilbraham, 2004, p. 496). As Parker emphasises, a discourse contains subjects: specifically, a discourse makes available a space for particular types of ‘self’ to step in. In this regard, a discourse analysis should ask what types of persons are talked about – or ‘addressed’ – in this discourse and, if identifying with this discourse, what rights we have to speak in this discourse. Attending to the manner whereby power relations shape the positioning of selves or subjects are positioned in discourse is critical.

Parker (1992) also emphasises that a thorough discourse analysis attends to how a discourse refers to other discourses, and the relationship between different discourses

in an analysis. Discourses are *interdependent*: “discourses embed, entail and presuppose other discourses” (Parker, 1992, p. 13). Through examining contradictions embedded in a discourse, it is possible to unravel the manner whereby multiple discourses are linked. Furthermore, discourses need to be treated as historically-located, emerging in an historical context.

Parker (1992) stresses that, while the above-mentioned criteria are necessary and sufficient for marking out particular discourses, discursive research should also attend to the manner whereby discourses link with institutions, power and ideology. This requires giving attention to the following questions within one’s analysis: identifying institutions which are *reinforced* or, alternatively, attacked and subverted when this or that discourse is used; addressing which categories of person gain and lose from the employment of the discourse and, consequently, who would want to promote or, alternatively, dissolve the discourse; and showing how a discourse connects with other discourses which sanction oppression. As Parker (1992) maintains, “We *should* talk about discourse and power in the same breath” (p. 18, emphasis in original). A feminist post-structuralist perspective, within which this study is located, demands careful attention to the material workings of power: “Feminist poststructuralism maintains an emphasis on the material bases of power (for example, social, economic, and cultural arrangements) and the need for change at this level. This emphasis and insistence distinguishes it from some poststructuralist approaches that are highly abstract and apparently ‘apolitical’ (Gavey, 1997, p. 54; see also Weedon, 1987).

As Wilbraham (2004) observes, Parker’s guidelines for the analysis of discourse are “committed to the spirit of Foucault’s ideas, which should be used as lenses and tools of examination rather than a ‘method’ to follow slavishly” (p. 495). In this regard, it is important, in discourse analysis, to ward against “methodolatry” (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 166) – a commitment to adhering to a method over producing an interesting and, I add, socially relevant and useful, account.

In line with Gavey and McPhillips (1999), the analyses in this study pay attention *both* to the language of the participants’ accounts as a route of theorising the discursive context which may shape young women’s experiences and choices she has, *as well as* what is told about the material context in which they are acting. Gavey and

McPhillips (1999) argue that “the material details of a woman’s experience – such as the nature and history of a heterosexual relationship, and the outcomes of previous experiences – are also essential ‘data’ for developing a feminist reading of ... women’s accounts” (p. 354). In my own analyses, I found it necessary, at times, to bring in such ‘extra-textual’ material – including the participants’ degree and nature of experience in heterosexual relationships, as well as elements of the socio-economic backdrop – as a way of giving some appreciation of relevant aspects in the broader contexts of the participants’ lives. While some researchers consider these ‘extratextual’ factors irrelevant or impossible to take into account, Gavey and McPhillips (1999) contend that such contextualisation “is necessary for developing an analysis that takes gendered power seriously” (p. 354). Nonetheless, one should not consider the inclusion of ‘extra-textual’ material as a step into ‘extra-discursive’ territory; rather this represents an acceptance that “the text to be analyzed is broader and more diffuse than just the words of a transcript written on the page” (Gavey & McPhillips, 1999, p. 354).

Analytical structure and conventions

Deciding upon an analytical structure presented many hours of agonising and re-structuring. When I first began the analysis, I worked case by case and sub-group by sub-group. Due to the multiple continuities across cases and across the sub-groups, I eventually decided upon an integrated analysis, which attends to difference where necessary and where it emerges. Because of the inter-dependent quality of discourses, the analysis is confined to a single, lengthy chapter. Many of the discursive dynamics that are contained within the participants’ talk span the content areas covered. The following chapter is structured as follows:

1. A protective and moral sex education: Keeping girls ‘safe’ and ‘good’
2. Playing the ‘love game’: Gender-differentiated discourses on heterosexuality
3. Girls ‘saving themselves’: Constructions of virginity
4. Girls ‘losing it’: Experiences of first sex
5. Beyond the bedroom: Gender, bodies and control in heterosexual ‘social’ relationships
6. Explanatory discourses on sexual risk-taking: ‘Bad girls/at risk’ categories

7. Beyond the 'bad girls' thesis: Being a 'good girl' may be hazardous for her health

Extracts drawn from focus group discussions and individual interviews are numbered, in order to facilitate in-text referencing, and presented according to the following conventions. Square brackets [] contain remarks about individual/group behaviour and tone, clarifying comments, and words which have been inserted by the researcher where the original audio-recording was momentarily inaudible. The term 'consensual noises', used within extracts drawn from focus group discussions, describes sounds which are readily interpreted as agreement, involving more than one speaker. At certain points (designated ...) words have been omitted to preserve the essence of the statement. Extracts drawn from focus groups are identified by the convention [Focus Group, Code]. The 'code' identifies the 'grouping' of participants involved in the focus group, and takes the form of MP (Masiphumelele), FH (Fish Hoek), or OV (Ocean View). Extracts from individual interviews are identified by the convention [Individual Pseudonym, Code]. Figure 1 (see p. 35) can be referred to for greater elaboration of participant details while reading. Where my own questions or comments, as the interviewer, are included in focus group and interview extracts, these are preceded by my initials (LK).

CHAPTER 4

Analysis

1. A protective and moral education: Keeping girls 'safe' and 'good'

Part one explores how adults communicate with adolescent girls about their sexuality. The analysis centres upon the manner whereby adult talk and, importantly, silences and non-verbal practices, are implicated in constructing female adolescent sexual subjectivity.

Sexuality as danger/victimisation

The participants' accounts suggest that sex education for young women is frequently couched within a 'protective' discourse, stressing the dangers that sexual activity can bring, and young women's potential to fall 'victim' to male sexuality, pregnancy and disease. Such findings are reflected by local and international studies (e.g. Fine, 1998; Henderson, 1999; Holland et al., 1994a; Lesch & Kruger, 2005; Reddy, 2005; Thomson & Scott, 1991; Tolman, 1994; Wood et al., 1998). Accounts from many of the young women imply that adults view talking to their daughters about sex as unnecessary, except when in the interest of conveying warnings:

Extract 1

My parents don't talk to me about sex. It's all: don't get your drink spiked or anything because [words trail off] ... My parents are very paranoid, *very, very paranoid*. [Kate, FH]

Extract 2

My parents hardly speak about it [sex] – because my mother trusts that I'm old enough to think for myself, not do stupid things. I'm not the type that will drink too much and do stupid stuff. But every now and again, if I must go partying or something, then she'll warn me and stuff. [Lisa, FH]

In this study, young woman's talk suggests that the 'dangers' of sex are often communicated through vague, metaphorical language, and in undefined terms.

Extract 3

Kate [FH] explained that, when she had asked her mother for advice about dating, her mother told her that every girl needs a system of "red robots" or "warning signs" – to avoid being "used" by boys, or going "too far" and falling pregnant or contracting HIV/AIDS.

Extract 4

There was this one example that my teacher made to us: it was like, you go to soccer practice, you practice with this ball. But when you go to a match, you *won't* play with that ball that you were practicing with, you going to get another new ball that you're going to play with. So ... girls are like this practice ball, but when [boys] are playing at this huge match - when they're getting married - they have to get another new ball; a clean, new ball. [Dudu, MP]

Extract 5

When Karen [OV] asked her mother what she would do should Karen start dating, her mother responded that if Karen started "riding around" [read 'dating'/ having sex / 'sleeping around?'] she would end up "coming home with a little car" [read 'falling pregnant?']. Karen, confused, asked her mother what she meant, only to be told: "because that's all that guys want: they just want sex". When she protested that "not all guys are like that", her father entered the conversation to confirm that this is, indeed, the case.

As the last extract suggests, adult talk conveys the idea that pregnancy - as well as diseases - are an inevitable consequence of sex, and that sex is therefore dangerous and should not be engaged in (see also Lesch & Kruger, 2005). Furthermore, given that "guys just want sex", even social relationships with young men should be avoided:

Extract 6

The parents are scared that ... if you have a boyfriend, you will break your virginity, and then you fall pregnant ... or get AIDS. [Dudu, MP]

For young women, then, abstinence (and 'staying away from boys') is the only option presented as a means of pregnancy and HIV prevention. Within this discourse, males are positioned as "potential predators" and females as "victims" (Fine, 1988, p. 32). This links with conventional constructions of sexuality, whereby males are considered to have greater sex drives, with females generally positioned as the recipients of males' sexual overtures. Hollway (1984; 1989) refers to this as the 'male sex drive' discourse. In this discourse, (young) women occupy the position of object. Despite the fact that young women are construed as potential victims of male sexuality, they are simultaneously (and somewhat paradoxically) deemed responsible for controlling the male sex drive. As these extracts suggest, young women are taught that they have to adhere to a rigid code of conduct if they are to avoid victimisation:

Extract 7

My mother always says, if you go out with a guy, always be prepared to pay your way ... Because if he's gonna end up buying you *presents* and things like that, he's always gonna expect something in return; if he buys jewellery, that's gonna be foot hold for him to say: but I gave you jewellery, and you are *expected* to sleep with me ... My mother always says, once a guy gives you something, and he's not promising to marry you, he'll always expect something in return. [Geraldine, OV]

Extract 8

I remember once, there was this lady [teacher] who was telling us, you've got to be really careful in a relationship, because it's not the guy you always have to worry about: it's also yourself. Because you could be doing something, say you start off kissing, but it doesn't just stop at the kiss, you know; it could end up you just sleeping with this guy. ... So she said, always be very, very wary of going too far with a guy ... It's like getting on a train... And you can't just jump off the train when it's already going, you know, you can't; you've got to wait for the next stop. And the next stop would be like – too late.

And she also said it was also very unfair for the guy, to make them go so far and then stop, you know? It's very unfair; you *can't* do that ... because you can't turn them on, and then say, well, sorry, you're going to have to turn off now ... [Helen, FH]

Fine (1988, p. 32) lists three problematic assumptions that underlie sex education that constructs sexuality as a moment of victimisation: (1) female subjectivity – including the desire to engage in sexual activity – is placed outside of the prevailing conversation; (2) female victimisation is construed as contingent upon unmarried, heterosexual involvement – rather than inherent in existing gender, class and racial arrangements; and (3) these messages, while narrowly anti-sexual, nevertheless buttress traditional heterosexual arrangements. These views assume that as long as females avoid premarital sexual relations with men, victimization can be avoided. Ironically, however, protection from male victimization is available primarily through marriage – by coupling with a man. The paradoxical message teaches females to fear the very men who will ultimately protect them.

Sexuality as individual morality

Sex education for young women is alternatively couched within a ‘discourse of (im)morality’, in which pre-marital sex is construed as immoral or sinful, and young women are the targets of moral injunctions to abstain from sex until marriage (Fine, 1988; Lesch & Kruger, 2005). This discourse is largely disseminated by parents and religious authorities, and is reflected within the following extracts:

Extract 9

- Xoliswa: Sometimes you hear in the home from your parents, saying, *don't have sex* ... You don't hear good things about it.
- Nomhle: They say *it's bad, bad, bad* ...
- Zuki: *Mustn't have sex before marriage* ...
- Zodwa: At my home, they say it's not good, don't *think* about sex, and don't even *try* to do it; it's not good.
- Dudu: And at the church, we're always told, we mustn't have sex before marriage ... It's because they think it's a sin or something ... because the Bible tells them that: no sex before marriage.

[Focus Group, MP]

Extract 10

My mother isn't against it [sex] as such. Ok, because we have an open relationship, like we speak about everything ... So, I was like, what would *you* do if I start having sex? She said, there's nothing that I *can*

do; but *just* for you to know that everybody is preaching that sex before marriage is a sin, the Bible preaches about it; and Father preaches about it on a Sunday in his service, and says before young people at youth that sex before marriage is a sin: so why are you gonna contradict that? And we taught you that it is wrong: because you have to wait till you married ... Because what will you have to offer your husband one day if you not a virgin? It's not *just* about the *viruses* ... AIDS, and stuff like that.

And the one thing that our pastor said is that sex is good, but wait until you're married. Because then you can enjoy it more, without having any consequences ... He's not gonna *lie* about it, because he's a married man, and for *him*, sex is good. But - he's married, and ... he doesn't have to sit with a conscience and think, oh my God! What are the people going to think about me because I'm having *sex*? [Karen, OV]

The discourse of morality further inscribes young women's emerging sexual subjectivities in negative terms: here, not only sexual activity but even sexual thoughts are 'sinful' ("don't *think* about sex, and don't even *try* to do it; it's not good" [Extract 9]). Here, the negative consequences of sex are broadened to include not only victimisation, pregnancy and disease ("It's not *just* about the viruses") but also a burden of guilt ("a conscience"), having nothing to "offer your husband", and the potential for negative social sanction ("What are people going to think about me because I'm having *sex*?") [Extract 10].

Unlike within the discourse of danger, whereby sex is framed in inherently negative terms, within the discourse of morality sex is framed as potentially "good"/acceptable and "enjoyable" if it takes place within the confines of a heterosexual, married relationship. Sexual pleasure is implicitly framed as the reward received by 'good girls who wait' ("you can enjoy it more") – and, conversely, pre-marital sexual relations are framed as giving less pleasure, given that they are accompanied by a burden of "a conscience" [Extract 10]. Additionally, girls are granted an explicit sense of sexual subjectivity within this discourse: rather than being positioned as passive sexual objects, young women are positioned as having the agency to 'choose' whether or not to have sex. Nonetheless, as Fine (1988, p. 32) points out, "this discourse values women's sexual decision-making, as long as the decisions made are for premarital sexual abstinence". The somewhat illusionary nature of this choice is evidenced in extract 10, wherein a mother tells her daughter that, were she to engage in sexual activity, "there's nothing I can do", but then follows by dictating a list of the

multiple authorities (“everyone”: the bible, the pastor, her parents) who say that “sex before marriage is a sin: so why are you gonna contradict that?”. In gender terms, one might argue that this discursive mode of communication is not only moralistic and judgemental, but inherently patriarchal: young women are “expected to head the wisdom of an all-knowing patriarch” (Morrell et al., 2002, p. 16) in unquestioning terms.

Protective and moral policing of girls’ bodies

The discourses circumscribing young women’s sex education advocate an anti-sex stance: the only option made available to girls who are invested in keeping themselves ‘safe’ and ‘good’ is abstinence. Although these discourses rely, to a large extent upon instilling fears and teaching codes of social conduct that will discourage young women away from sex (through self-regulation, and by ‘choice’), this is reinforced by adult (particularly parental) techniques of surveillance and regulation of girls’ access to spaces beyond the institutional confines of the home, the school and organised religion.

Young women characterise the advent of their adolescent years as a point from which parent figures became increasingly “strict”, requiring that their activities be conducted under adult supervision, and concerned with knowing their whereabouts at all times.

Extract 11

Every time I leave the house, my parents want: name, number, address, where I’m going, when I’m going back, who you going with ... They think I’m going to make the same mistakes as everybody else ...

My mom usually just tries to keep me at home, just to keep me safe from all those *bad things* out there. But it’s kind of confining, because I really want to get out and get to *meet* people, but I can’t because I have to tell my mom where I’m going, and I’m not old enough to do certain things ... She doesn’t want us [daughters] to ruin our lives by getting pregnant while we’re still so young. So that’s why she probably keeps us at home, so we don’t go out doing stupid things and getting ourselves into trouble But I guess what I need is just a little more space to try something. She *says* we must experience things for ourselves, but as soon as we want to, she doesn’t let us ... She doesn’t want us to follow in someone else’s footsteps. Because ... a friend of

mine, who's eighteen now, has a little daughter of about 2, 3 years old. So, that's one of the reasons my mom keeps us in. [Sally, FH]

This increase in parental surveillance, monitoring and supervision is often justified by parents to their frustrated daughters as 'for their own good' ("she doesn't want us to ruin our lives by getting pregnant when we're so young" [Extract 11]). Parents convey the idea that young women are sexually vulnerable beyond the 'safe' (read 'adult-supervised') confines of the home: to their own propensity to do "stupid things" and to "getting themselves in trouble". 'Keeping girls in' comes to serve as an enforced prophylactic device. The practice of 'keeping girls in' is often rationalised by parents by appeal to the notion that, when girls are not under parental surveillance, they are prone to succumbing to male sexual advances and negative peer influence. The logic holds that 'good' girls can easily – unwittingly – go 'bad' when they are exposed to external influences. As the following extract suggests, even the best parenting can be rendered ineffective when a daughter is "outside the door":

Extract 12

- Karen: I mean, your parents know what you do in the house, but, my mother's constantly telling me, I don't know what you do when you around the corner ...
- Nerissa: You not her child when you outside the door ...
- Chantelle: Once you leave the home ...
- Karen: They don't know if you going to adhere to what they say – because your friends can influence you *so easy!*
- Nerissa: My mommy always say that: you not her child if you outside, because then you're like a whole different person.
- Geraldine: Your friends can always influence you in some sort of negative way ...

[Focus Group, OV]

While virginity and sexual innocence is presumed and expected of adolescent girls by adults, girls' activities that take place in spaces that are unsupervised by adults are nonetheless highly sexualised:

Extract 13

- Xoliswa: If you are out with your friends, they [parents] think you are out having sex ...
- Nomhle: If you go out to a party, they think you are going to have sex ...

Xoliswa: It's always about *sex, sex, sex* ...

[Focus Group, MP]

Adolescent girls are presumed to be sexually innocent, ignorant of the facts of sex, and unable to bear the consequences that sex may bring (such as pregnancy), yet their bodies are simultaneously constructed as saturated with sexuality (and requiring an expression for this). Macleod (2006) highlights this contradictory treatment of adolescent sexuality, figuring this as an outcome of the 'transitional discourse' circumscribing adolescence. Within this discourse, adolescence is construed as a time of transition between child and adult, with vestiges of one (childhood) remaining while the other (adulthood) is being developed. The simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of childhood and adult characteristics means that (hetero)sexuality is both recognised in adolescent girls (it is a 'natural' drive, that requires expression) and problematised (it is 'unnatural', as she is still a child, who is ignorant of the facts of sex, and therefore innocent). This dual construction of adolescent heterosexuality justifies adult control over adolescent's bodies and sexuality.

Parental policing of girls' bodies is circumscribed by notions of appropriate pursuits for girls, and appropriate places in which girls can conduct these pursuits – and such notions are morally-imbued.

Extract 14

When I want to talk about those kind of things - sex, boyfriends - I find it hard to go to my mother ... She only talks about church and stuff. How I can become a good Christian. Not more than that ... My parents say: you have to stay at home; watch TV, do chores, do *nothing*. Don't do any kind of activity; just go out to *church*, and come back and go to *school* and learn and come back. Then they gonna be *just fine* ... if you do just that. [Phumla, MP]

Extract 15

[My grandmother] don't want any boyfriends. She wants to go to church every Sunday. And every day and night, we mustn't go chasing our friends; you must look at your books, clean the house, and stuff ... The thing that she told us most: we are going to get AIDS; you're going to get pregnant! [Zuki, MP]

As these extracts suggest, within young women's representations of adult communication, dating and sex (alongside socialising with friends) are often set up – through silence and through talk - in antithetical terms to the 'appropriate' pursuits in which girls 'should' be engaging: a ritual of going to school, coming home and attending to chores and studies, and only leaving the home to attend church, in the aid of being "a good Christian" [Extract 14]. Within such conversations, concrete talk about heterosexual relationships and sex is either displaced by moral injunctions of what girls 'should' be doing, or surfaces in the form of the negative consequences that befall girls who do *not* do as they 'should'. Those young women who do not do as they 'should' not only stand the chance of losing out in terms of their education (academic, moral and social) – which will equip them to become 'good' women – but are also construed as wilfully placing themselves 'at risk' of pregnancy and disease. In this respect, the threat of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases may be used by parents as a means of keeping their daughters engaged in 'appropriate' pursuits, and away from 'inappropriate' ones. This is particularly salient in the extract below:

Extract 16

You turn this side – HIV/AIDS; you turn that side – HIV/AIDS ... All the time – HIV/AIDS; all time, AIDS ... Even at your house maybe, your parents' house, like when you've done something wrong, you get in the house late – they say: *you'll get AIDS!* You'll go, what did you do? You didn't sleep with anybody – now your parents are going to tell you are going to get AIDS – *for what?* [Xoliswa, MP]

The logic that parental admonitions convey is that 'good' girls are rewarded by not falling pregnant or contracting diseases, while 'bad' girls will be 'punished' by pregnancy and disease. The discourse of danger is, in this respect, inscribed with morally-imbued elements, and the protective and moral policing of girls' bodies are closely intertwined: girls who are 'good' will remain 'safe', while girls who do *not* do as they should render themselves vulnerable to sexual danger. This serves to construct pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases as stigmatising markers of wrong-doing (in a very generalised sense), rather than an outcome of unprotected sex per se.

In some instances, adult control over girls' bodies and sexuality goes beyond restricting their access to certain spaces. Adults also take custodial control of girls' bodies through alternatively forbidding contraception (in the aid of supposedly

discouraging their daughters from having sex), or through practices of forced placement of girls on contraception.

Extract 17

Nerissa: I know this girl, she had a baby; she was only fourteen when she feel pregnant ... And her mommy's friends with my mommy, so her mommy says, after she had the baby, the doctor told her she's supposed to go on a contraceptive. And then her mommy said, no, she's not gonna put her on a contraceptive, otherwise then she's gonna have sex; and her mommy don't want her to have sex ...

Geraldine: And then, some parents, they actually put their child on – like one of the people I know, she just put her daughter on the injection ... because she decided that, what if my daughter get raped? She just – she just put her daughter on the injection without even consulting her daughter ...

[Focus Group, OV]

In both of the scenarios presented within this extract, the message conveyed to young women is that decision-making around contraception (and sex) is not theirs to make: it is parental and medical authorities dictating these terms. Additionally, the presumption underpinning both scenarios is that adolescent girls are, or should be, sexually innocent and chaste. In the first scenario, a young woman is forbidden from using birth control ostensibly as a means of keeping her from engaging in any further sexual activity (which she should not be engaging in, although she has nonetheless). In the second scenario, contraception is forced upon an adolescent girl because she may innocently fall prey to male sexual predators. Other studies confirm that it is common practice for mothers to take their daughters for the contraceptive injection at the first sign of a boyfriend, or at the onset of menarche (Kelly & Parker, 2000; Shefer, 1998; Wood, Maepa & Jewkes, 1997). These authors suggest that such practices have resulted in less practical instruction of both young women and men, and send the implicit message that young women are responsible for protection.

Gendered allocations of sexual responsibility

The participants often pointed out that adult negativity surrounding girls' sexuality, and the protective and moral policing that adults exert over girls' bodies and movements, are founded upon a gendered double standard. While girls' sexual education is circumscribed by injunctions about the danger and immorality of sex, young women maintain that boys' sexuality tends to be "ignored":

Extract 18

- Dudu: If a boy is having sex, it's not a big deal. But if a *girl* is having sex, it is a big deal. Because they're like, 'you're gonna get *pregnant!*'. But it's also boys!
- LK: So what is the attitude towards boys having sex?
- Multiple voices: It's ignored ...
- Xoliswa: A boy can come back from wherever he went any time. But when a girl comes home – 'where do you come from? *Ah, you have been with boys!*' [Consensual noises]
- Dudu: Like, my cousin, he usually goes away for the *whole* weekend; nobody knows where he is. And when he comes back – *no one asks him!* It's like fine, it's ok ... [Consensual noises] But if *you* do that! Yoo! Then it will be a family meeting! [Laughter]

[Focus Group, MP]

Thus, while girls are warned about the dangers of male sexuality, and that their bodies require strict surveillance and (self-) control if they are to be kept 'safe', the boys who they are warned about are allowed to do as they please, without reprimand. Male sexuality is, in this respect, hyperbolised and constructed as dangerous within adult communication, but receives little censure in practice. Girls are taught that they have to play by a set of social/sexual rules that boys do not have to adhere to. While young women are conscious and often critical of this double standard, there are discursive processes in operation that constrain young women from actively challenging this scenario:

Extract 19

When I ask my mom if I can go out, it's always: who's going to be there? Why do you want to go? What are you going to do? Which she *never asks the boys* But with me, it's always an *in-depth* analysis of *who* is going to be there and *what* is going to happen, and all those things. It's very stressful sometimes ...

I guess there are certain implications of **being the only girl**, and why she's so over-protective of me, and not the boys ... Because, with my cousin, one of my cousins recently, she's engaged to be married, but the reason why she got engaged was because she was pregnant, and it was a *big* thing ...

She's [mother] actually scared of losing me. Not that I might stray, but that something bad might happen. Because they [parents] depend on me. Like, my brothers are hopeless with responsibility. And I'm reliable; they can depend on me to always do the right thing. But the boys are like, if they want to do whatever, they will just do it ... They're [parents] not over-protective, but they're protective of what and who they want. They know that I have goals and things for myself, so – they kind of want to enforce that, and they kind of want me to stay the way I am for as long as possible ... [so] that they can feel as though they have fulfilled their role as parents ... [Karen, OV]

The extract above is illustrative of some of the discursive contradictions inherent in the protective practices circumscribing adolescent girls' sexuality: boys cannot be policed because 'boys will be boys' and cannot be taught responsibility; young women, on the other hand are "reliable" and responsible (and can be "depended upon" to "always do the right thing). Girls nonetheless require societal 'protection' (in the form of constraints upon their movements and activities) - *not* because they "might stray" but because "something bad might happen" *to* them. These ideas reflect the extent to which adolescence, as a socio-historical construct, is implicitly gendered in a manner that is best occupied by the masculine (Macleod, 2006). Hudson (as cited in Fine & Macpherson, 1992, p. 176) explains the incompatibility of femininity and the experimenting adolescent:

[F]emininity and adolescence as discourses are subversive of each other. All our images of the adolescent – the restless, searching teen; the Hamlet figure; the sower of wild oats and tester of growing powers – these are masculine figures ... If adolescence is characterized by masculine constructs, then any attempt by girls to satisfy society's demands of them qua adolescents is bound to involve them displaying notably a lack of maturity but also a lack of femininity.

As this young woman's account suggests [Extract 19], parental emphasis on preserving a daughter's chastity is not only a matter of keeping her from harm: a chaste daughter comes to confer a marker of 'good parenting' ("they kind of want me to stay the way I am for as long as possible ... [so] they can feel as though they have fulfilled their role as parents"). Other studies have suggested, a chaste daughter confers respect upon her family (Weiss et al., 1996), and confers respectability upon her mother in particular (Salo, 2004). These same studies find, conversely, that family influences generally see sexual experience as a desired goal for young men, linked with their developing concept of masculinity.

Discursive silences/silencing

Extract 20

- Geraldine: They [adults] tell you the consequences ...
Karen: But it's not exactly like, the *real stuff*: like, the personal details, *how you feel*, and stuff like that ... all things that youngsters *expect*, *think* it's like ...
[Focus Group, OV]

The discourses pervading young women's sexual socialisation circumscribe their sexuality in terms of danger and immorality. This discursive framing brings into being a culture of silences and silencing surrounding young women's sexuality. In many cases, adult injunctions to girls – to stay away from boys, abstain from sex, and 'do as they should' – provides a foundation for a pervasive silence surrounding sex: while adults appear to communicate about sex with young women in a relentless manner, this is often through silence, metaphor and negation. Striking, in many instances, is the fact that young women's representations of 'how adults communicate about sex' often do not even contain the word 'sex'. Young women nonetheless interpret adult warnings and practices of 'keeping them inside' as allusions to sexual danger.

While young women are taught to recognise and control male sexual desire, they are not taught that they, too, have desires, and how to respond to these in an empowered manner. The only allusion to female sexual desire (see extract 8) takes the form of a teacher's warning that "going too far" will result in a young woman inevitably having sex, and will arouse dangerous male desire. Others have observed that even adults

who are willing or able to acknowledge that adolescent girls experience sexual feelings worry that knowing about their own sexual desire will place them in danger (Segal, as cited in Tolman, 1994). A South African study reports that mothers of adolescent girls expressed the sentiment that talking about the spectrum of experiences and feelings accompanying sex was inappropriate and indecent, and that attempts to curb their daughters' sexuality were the only way they knew of how to protect their daughters from harm (Anthony, as cited in Lesch & Kruger, 2005). Religious beliefs compound this scenario, whereby even talking about sex can be regarded as 'sinful' (Lesch & Kruger, 2005). Nonetheless, even when the constraint surrounding open communication about sex is conducted under the best of intentions on the part of adults, this aids the production of a specific form of female sexual subjectivity which constrains young women from viewing themselves as sexual agents, rather than objects and potential victims of male desire.

Desire aside, adult communication about sex rarely addresses the complexity of relationships and feelings. Young women's talk suggests that adult injunctions to stay away from boys minimises the sometimes powerful feelings that they experience in these relationships:

Extract 21

They don't want us to be involved in a relationship with our boyfriends. So they shout at us all the time; *why are you playing with that boyfriend?* They don't know that we are in love with that boyfriend. [Zodwa, MP]

This extract suggests that young women view the responses of parents towards their heterosexual relationships in undermining terms: here, parents reprimand their daughters for "playing" with boyfriends, while this young woman construes these relationships as intimate and significant. More generally, young women express feeling ill-equipped with information about their bodies, the changes these undergo during puberty, about STIs and pregnancy, and with the psychosocial preparation and support needed for negotiating the complexity of heterosexual relationships.

Extract 22

My mommy hasn't really spoken to me about periods-puberty-boyfriends-sex-STIs and stuff like that ... I don't think that's right! ... I don't know *why* or *what* or *when* or *how* ... When I went out with that other *outjie* [boy], I wanted her to *ask* stuff about our relationship: how it is, and how it's going ... *So man*, she don't *nothing*! ... I can't go to my mommy and say, I got this crush on some *outjie* and I'm really upset about it, because he doesn't feel the same way. We don't have that type of relationship. I don't know if she's *scared* to speak to me or *what*, but she doesn't talk to me about anything ... [Natalie, OV]

Many of the participants' accounts suggest that young women's sexuality marks a moment of disconnection in their relationships with significant adults, and their relationships with their mothers in particular. However, it is also clear that young women play a role in enforcing inter-generational disconnection. Many appear to keep their sexual activity and relationships deliberately secret, for fear of disrupting their relationships with significant adults: as one of the participants contended, "a lot of girls ... they don't *allow* their moms to see them as they *are*" [Helen, FH]. One young woman admits that:

Extract 23

I don't say *anything* about it; like, *nothing*. Literally: the first time I kissed someone ... My mom is like, *Oh! My daughter is so pure* ... And I was like: *if you only knew* ... I don't want her to *know* that that's what I do. You know? ... I think the only way I can explain it is like Gemini: there's like two faces of me, you know, where I want to keep like that whole image of angel in front of my mom, but then I know in myself that I'm not an angel; I mean, seriously, I'm *not*. And I just kind of wish that she would know that, but in a way I don't want her to know ... I think she wouldn't trust me then ... and there's hardly any trust in the first place. So, it would just like *totally kill* any trust that we have in each other, you know? So I just prefer her just to think I'm an angel ... I think I've just kind of got used to not letting people see parts of me, you know? [Kate, FH]

As these accounts suggest, girls feel that they have to hide "who they *are*" if they are to avoid disrupting the mother-daughter relationship. This requires that girls uphold the adult 'presumption of innocence' – even when girls are conscious, as Kate is, that they are *not* innocent, resulting in a situation wherein girls feel the necessity to assumed a 'dual persona': "there's like two faces of me ... where I want to keep like

that whole image of angel in front of my mom, but then I know in myself that I'm not an angel" [Extract 23].

2. Playing the ‘love game’: Gender-differentiated discourses on heterosexuality

Extract 1

There is this thing at school that people say: ‘*no one loves anyone; it’s just a big game!* It’s a *love game*’ ... So everyone should participate, because there is no such thing as real love ... It’s more like we’re just playing; it’s a game. Because people play with other people’s feelings; that’s the way it is. But more especially guys; *yoh*, they’ll play with girls’ feelings ... they don’t feel ashamed to have four to five girlfriends ... So, I think the girls are realising that, because now, even the girls are playing with guys’ feelings ... [Dudu, MP]

Part two turns to explore young women’s own socially constructed meanings of heterosexual sexuality. Specific attention is paid to gender-differentiated constructions of male and female sexuality and desire. The opening quote [Extract 1] encompasses one young woman’s characterisation of heterosex and heterosexual relationships. This young woman draws upon a useful metaphor – the “love game” – for understanding how male and female sexuality ‘play’ out, in practice. This game is inherently male-defined and male-dominated (boys are ‘players’ and girls are ‘played’). Although this young woman suggests that her female counterparts are starting to take up a more agentic position in the “love game” (“now, even the girls are playing with guy’s feelings”), the material presented will suggest that there are certain social mechanisms in place that constrain young women from taking up a more agentic stance. Drawing upon a similar metaphor, Holland and colleagues (1996) contend that, in heterosex: “women must learn to play by the masculine rules of the game, or take the consequences of resistance” (p. 158).

Romance, victimhood and disembodiment

It is well-recognised that discourses on female (heterosexual) sexuality need to be read and understood alongside discourses on male sexuality. As discussed within the literature review (see chapter two), and resonating with material presented in part one of this chapter, female sexual identity for heterosexual women is discursively constructed within a context which defines sex in terms of men’s drives and needs. Young women’s talk circumscribing male (heterosexual) sexuality is framed in

inherently negative terms, represented as uncontrollable, unstoppable, self-serving and victimising. This construction of male sexuality has been widely-identified within the literature, both locally and internationally, and has coined the label the 'male sex drive discourse' (Hollway, 1984; 1989).

Extract 2

All guys are the same in every way: ... they only think about themselves, and their needs, and never about what other people need. And it's just about them, and what they want at the time. And if they want it [sex], then nobody else can stop them ... [Geraldine, OV]

Extract 3

With boys here, sex is just an appetite. Just have sex; then it's done; he's done with you. [Xoliswa, MP]

Extract 4

Girls actually, they don't know what they're letting them[selves] in for. Because ... a lot of the boys in Ocean View, they tend to use the girls, you know? ... They would date you, and when they finished with you - they had sex with you - they *dump* you; they don't want to do nothing. They just leave you ... [Chantelle, OV]

Extract 5

Some girls think that sex is going to be a good feeling. But actually I think it's to do with the people in the relationship: because if you don't have that connection, like communication and stuff, it's not going to work ... It's not. Because the girl is gonna feel used and left out, and he'd just forget about her and move onto the next victim, you know? Because, I mean, everybody knows guys go after one thing - and that's sex; so that they can feel good about *themselves*. But for women it's more of the spiritual level. You know, not the physical ... the key is the relationship - and if the relationship is good, sex will be good, you know? [Jane, FH]

Here, young men are positioned as active, desiring subjects of sex, with young women relegated to a position of sexual object or "victim" [Extract 5]: young men 'do' sex, while young women have sex 'done' to them. Within this framework, sex is primarily geared towards the satisfaction of the male sexual "appetite" [Extract 3]. While young men enjoy sex for its own sake - "so that they can feel good about *themselves*" [Extract 5] - young women's sexual enjoyment is dependent upon the quality of the relationship in which it takes place. Young women who explore their sexuality out of

the confines of a committed relationship expose themselves to being victimised by males. In this regard, female sexual pleasure and danger are never far apart: active pleasure-seeking comes with dangerous consequences, and sacrificing pleasure becomes a small price to pay for the safety of intimacy and commitment.

While, for men, sex is framed in uncomplicated terms of self-gratification, and sexual satisfaction is an uncomplicated by-product of the physical act of sex, for young women, sex is constructed as more complicated and rule-bound, and disconnected from “the physical” [Extract 5] and embodiment. For young women, sex is inseparable from relationships, commitment and love:

Extract 6

[Sex] is about the love; what it symbolises. It has a lot of meaning; it happens between two people who love each other. You can't just go around and sleep with every guy that you can find ... I don't see the point in just sleeping with someone, just for the fun of it. I mean, sure, it feels good – but there's no point in it. If it's with someone you love, the experience is more pleasurable, should I say. It's more on the emotional side than the physical side. I mean, if you really love this person ... that's where the pleasure comes from ... [Sally, FH]

Extract 7

[Sex] shouldn't be like something that just happens; it should be something that, in a relationship, that should be cherished, like, forever ... with someone who you see as special. I think it should be an emotional thing; it shouldn't just be like, just, *sex*. It should be like *making love*. I always hear this: it shouldn't be just like a physical thing; it should be *emotions attached* and everything. [Faiza, OV]

Extract 8

Actually, for me, in a relationship – a relationship has not to be about sex only. You know, just sit together and talk about things. So, I'm not into sex anyway; and I'm not interested; I don't like it that much ... My friends don't really enjoy it ... They say, the relationship must not be about sex, you know? You must always ... sit together, and joke together, go to the movies – that kind of thing; not only sex, every time sex ... [Somi, MP]

The language within which these accounts are framed contains female sexuality within a clear set of rules surrounding what sex ‘should’, ‘must’, ‘has to’, and ‘can’ be (and what sex should not, must not, and cannot be). Sex “shouldn't be just a physical

thing” – it is “about” the love and the relationship which it comes to stand as symbolising [Extract 7; 6]. Sex is about relationships – but relationships “must not be about sex only” [Extract 8]. As extract 8 suggests, sexual interest and enjoyment are not something that a young women can or should admit to themselves, or amongst female peers. Reflecting local and international literature (Shefer & Foster, 2001; Thompson, 1984; 1990; Tolman, 2000), young women’s talk about sexuality is discursively framed within a romantic discourse. Female sexuality is only legitimated when it is centred upon ‘love’, ‘relationships’, ‘emotions’ and ‘spirituality’. Sex is divorced from ‘the physical’: it is symbolic and meaningful.

Male and female sexuality are often constructed as antagonistic and in opposition to one another within young woman’s talk, as in this extract:

Extract 9

Romance ... it is a difficult thing to find. Because ... the guys aren’t into romance ... they just want sex ... they just having fun; you know, going around having sex with people; they think it’s a joke ... They think it’s a joke, having sex. But it’s not. It’s not a joke. Some of them, they don’t think that they will hurt other people ... Boys don’t really understand girls; how they feel about a relationship ... [Somi, MP]

The gendered partitioning of heterosexuality in terms of (male) ‘agent’/sex part and (female) ‘object’/love part is reinforced by appeal to biological determinist discourse, which rely upon essentialist notions of ‘difference’ in male and female sexuality, as in these quotes:

Extract 10

I don’t think that men think about the emotional side of sex as much as women – say now women are more emotional; that they’ll think about the emotional side, and also like they’re wanting to feel loved, and to be with someone, and, you know, like having someone so close. And men just don’t. [Natalie, OV]

Extract 11

A lot of girls *pretend* that it [sex] means nothing to them. But you can’t kid yourself ... I think girls try to be like guys, where they don’t take sex in an emotional way. But girls always have to remember that they take everything at an emotional level, because that’s who they are, and

that's how they've been made, you know? We take everything at an emotional level. [Helen, FH]

Here, femininity is essentialised as “more emotional” [Extract 10] and love-oriented than masculinity, and ‘women’s nature’ bars them from taking up the ‘no-strings-attached’ approach to sex available to men. Young women who take up a ‘no-strings-attached’ approach to sex are masquerading as male (girls who “try to be like a guy” [Extract 11]). Displays of active female sexuality not only signal a lack of femininity, but are ‘unnatural’. Appeal to biological determinist discourse renders the gender-differentiated rules of the “love game” as ‘natural’ rather than social, and obscures the structural inequalities that underpin this scenario.

Girls as ‘gate-keepers’ of male sexuality

Neither the ‘romance discourse’ nor the ‘male sex drive discourse’ offers young women a position as active, desiring sexual subject: young women are positioned as less sexual than their male counter-parts (and even asexual), or as objects of male sexuality. The de-centring of women’s desire in conventional discourses on sexuality, and their consequent status as ‘less sexual’ than men – or even asexual – renders them more in control of their sex drives. The social mythology that centres upon the belief that (young) men cannot control their sex drives but (young) women can is popularly-held, and well-documented (Fine, 1988; Levett, 1989; Moore & Rosenthal, 1998; Shefer & Foster, 2001; Tolman, 2000; Vance, 1984; Wood & Foster, 1995). Through this culturally-dictated chain of reasoning, women are allocated the role of ‘sexual gate-keeper’, whereby “women become the moral custodians of male behaviour, which they are perceived as instigating and eliciting” (Vance, 1984, p. 4). The myth that male sexuality is uncontrollable and easily aroused by any show of active female sexual desire is an ideology that tends towards victim-blaming, and letting men off the hook, as is evident in these extracts:

Extract 12

Some girls are just *loose*, as such, you know. And some guys see it as ‘I know you’d do that one’; you’d sleep with her or whatever. Then ... they want to try it out, see if she’s going to be willing to sleep with them as well, seeing that she slept with someone else; she’s not a

virgin. And it's more difficult to like do that with someone who is one, you know, because they think about it more, and so ... [Natalie, OV]

Extract 13

Some of the guys that I know, they want to sleep with girls that aren't virgins anymore. And one day I asked, why? And he said, no, because they don't want to be responsible for breaking a girl's virginity. [Lisa, FH]

Extract 14

Some guys [say] they couldn't just sleep around with *any* girl ... One guy told me, 'I slept with this girl, and now I feel like I haven't been honourable to her, and I feel like *such* a bad person'. He started *totally* destroying himself; I was like, 'you know something, girls feel like that *all the time*' ... And I was just thinking – maybe if it had been somebody else, like some girl who just slept around or something, it wouldn't have been such a big deal for him ... [Helen, FH]

These extracts imply that young women who guard their virginity simultaneously guard themselves from being 'used' or treated as sexual objects by boys. Here, girls who take responsibility for their sexuality – by saying no to sex – impress a certain degree of sexual responsibility upon boys: "they don't want to be responsible for breaking a girl's virginity" [Extract 13]; "they think about it more" [Extract 12]; "feel like I haven't been honourable to her ... like *such* a bad person" [Extract 14]. On the other hand, girls who are "loose" [Extract 12] (i.e. those who have a sexual history / who behave like boys) are seen as 'asking for sex', and warranting little respect from boys: "they want to try it out ... seeing that ... she's not a virgin" [Extract 12]; "if it had been ... some girl who just slept around ... it wouldn't have been such a big deal for him" [Extract 14]. Through this chain of reasoning, sexual responsibility and accountability fall almost entirely upon young women. When boys 'use' girls, this reflects negatively upon girls' moral reputations – who are seen as 'loose' women - rather than upon boys'. Girls are policed through guilt – feeling like a "bad person" [Extract 14] – whenever they have sex, while boys only experience a sense of guilt and responsibility when their partner has a 'clean' reputation. Thus, boys are removed from a position of responsibility and accountability for their actions, and rarely suffer any negative (psychological or social) correlates of their actions.

Self-discipline and sexual constraint

Beyond its tendency towards victim-blaming, this ideology has the particularly insidious effect of leading women to experience their own passions and desires as dangerous, a signal of giving up control rather than a source of empowerment (Fine, 1988; Shefer & Foster, 2001; Tolman, 1994; 2000; Vance, 1984). This particular effect of this ideology clearly interferes with and is inscribed upon young women's experiences of desire:

Extract 15

I remember once, there was this lady teacher who was telling us, you've got to be really careful in a relationship, because it's not the guy you always have to worry about: it's also yourself. Because you could be doing something, say you start off kissing, but it doesn't just stop at the kiss, you know; it could end up you just sleeping with this guy. And you never know, I mean, it *does* happen ... So she said, always be very, very wary of going too far with a guy ... And I always go back to that: it always reminds me that, you know, it's like getting on a train... And you can't just jump off the train when it's already going, you know, you can't; you've got to wait for the next stop. And the next stop would be like – too late.

And she also said it was also very unfair for the guy, to make them go so far and then stop, you know? It's very unfair; you *can't* do that ... A lot of guys will say to you, that's exactly how it is, because you can't turn them on, and then say, well, sorry, you're going to have to turn off now ... It's not like that, you know?

There was an occasion like that. And I was like ... ok, well, what am I going to do now? Because I was out of my mind, and I wasn't there, and I think he kind of *realised* that ... the guy – shame ... I had lost control. And then I was just like: oh, my word! What am I doing? And I didn't pull away, but I think he kind of realised that somewhere he'd lost me, totally, like, emotionally, you know? And then he just pulled away, and was like: I'm going for a walk ... I *felt* so bad. I had to go after him the next day, and say I was *really, really* sorry, you know; this is my fault and stuff. And then he was like: 'no, no, no ... you can't always be the one to pull away; the guy, out of respect, should do it'. But not all guys see it that way. And I was *very* lucky that it was with him – and not with someone else ... I think I learned from that ... what you *can* and can't say to a guy; that you've got to be careful, what you do; what sort of signals you give off ...
[Helen, FH]

Extract 16

I told myself, I don't want to have sex anymore, because it's *really, really* hard to have control when ... sex is involved. You actually lose control ... It's like, maybe you're over-powered by your feelings and stuff, so you can't really control them or something ... Sometimes, it's like the physical and emotional feelings, they strike you at the same time. And it's *really* hard to control them, and you actually end up doing something that, when you *think* about it, you didn't actually want to do it ... You only realise *after* ... Because, sometimes, you actually know *this is wrong*; but your feelings are telling you something else. And then you actually feel confused. But, even if you are confused, you know this is *wrong*. But you actually end up doing something that you *knew* was bad – but you couldn't control yourself. It's actually harder to control yourself than it is to control other people around you ... Ai! ... When you're not in control, people will take advantage of you: because you're not in control, you do whatever they ask you to do. So it's better to put your foot down and say, *no*. [Dudu, MP]

As these extracts suggest, the ideology of female control and responsibility is one that is powerfully internalised by young women, transmitted through gendered practices of sexual socialisation, and reinforced through heterosexual experience. Here, it is not just a matter of young women being at the mercy of dangerous and uncontrollable male desires, but it is their own behaviours and desires that render this the case. These young women frame their experiences of desire in inherently negative terms of 'losing control', rather than in terms of empowerment. Furthermore, both young women speak of their desires in inherently disembodied terms: Dudu [Extract 16] speaks of being "over-powered" by her "feelings", which seemingly "strike" her from an external location; similarly, Helen [Extract 15] frames her experience of desire in terms of being "out of my mind ... I wasn't there". These young women appear to have difficulty in articulating or interpreting their desires as an integrated part of themselves, and speak about these in dissociated terms. As Tolman (1994) has argued, being positioned as an object – and potential victim – of male sexual desire can make it difficult for young women to interpret their own sexual feelings and desires.

As Dudu's account [Extract 16] suggests, the division between what a young woman 'wants' or does not want, on the one hand, and what she perceives as 'right' or 'wrong', on the other, is not always clear-cut. Cultivating self-control and restraint is not simply a matter of self-protection, but also a matter of moral integrity: and losing

control comes to signify not only danger (“When you’re not in control, people will take advantage of you”) but also an individual moral transgression (“You actually end up doing something that you *knew* was bad”).

Through this ideology, women inherit the substantial task of managing both their own desires, as well as those of men. Self-control and watchfulness become necessary female virtues, and women’s experience of desire comes to signal giving up or losing control (Vance, 1984). Consequently, “female desire is suspect from its first tingle, questionable until proven safe, and frequently too expensive when evaluated within the larger cultural framework which poses the question: is it really worth it?” (Vance, 1984, p. 4). As Dudu’s account [Extract 16] suggests, the answer to this question is likely to be ‘no’. As long as “young women are taught to fear and defend in isolation from exploring desire ... there is little possibility of their developing a critique of gender or sexual arrangements” (Fine, 1988, p. 30-31). Tolman (1994) supports this argument, stating: “Although disciplining their bodies and curbing their desire is a very logical way to stay physically, socially and emotionally safe, it also heightens the chance that girls and women may lose track of the fact that an inequitable social system, and not a necessary situation, renders women’s desire a source of danger, rather than one of pleasure and power in their lives” (p. 339).

Discipline and punish: Male censorship of female sexuality

The difficulty girls have in playing the ‘love game’ in anything other than male terms is also restricted by the threat of violent punishment from males, as this young woman relates:

Extract 17

Most of the time, the girls don’t cheat: it’s just the boy, and then the girlfriend does the same thing after the boy. To get back at him. It doesn’t work most of the time. Like, when I ask the other girls, they tell me that it doesn’t work. Because if you have the other boyfriend, then if your boyfriend finds out you’ve been cheating on him, he will be beating her. So I don’t think it works; it doesn’t work. [Phumla, MP]

Other South African studies have found that, while the ability to be sexual with multiple women is socially accepted and even rewarded for males, females who are unfaithful to their partners can be faced with violent retribution (MacPhail & Campbell, 2001; Wood et al., 1998). Girls' consciousness of the threat of violence contributes to their censorship of their sexuality. However, their sexual objectification grants them little empowerment to demand the same from their partners. Furthermore, young women appear to play a colluding role in sustaining this scenario: the young woman who provided the quote above [Extract 17] went on to add that, when a young man is unfaithful, his girlfriend tends to react by competing with the "other girl" for her boyfriends' attention, and that a young woman who successfully "wins back" the exclusive attention of boyfriend gains status amongst her peers: "she becomes known in public; she impresses the public", while the "other girl" suffers a loss in status. Again, it is young women, rather than young men, who are punished for male infidelity.

While violent retaliation is one mechanism whereby female sexuality is constrained and censored, there is also evidence of more subtle workings of gendered power in operation. The extracts below, drawn from a focus group discussion and an individual interview, which reflect sexually active girls' responses to whether and how their attitudes and feelings surrounding sex had changed over time, are illustrative of this:

Extract 18

Dudu: Now that you are older, you know that there are playboys ... I think you have feelings when you are older. Like when you sleep with the guy, and the next morning you hear about it from *his* friends ... you start feeling bad about yourself. And now, I think the girls in our age want to have sex with the right people, when it's like a stable relationship. But back then, it was fun; you did it with whoever you wanted to do it ...

Nomhle: You didn't plan sex ...

[Focus Group, MP]

Extract 19

I've actually changed ... Now, it's more like a big deal ... I think when I have sex with another person it should be like the *real thing* ... Getting involved with them *emotionally* ... Because, if you do sex, and then you say, 'no, it's not a big deal, we did it', it's more like that

person thinks that you were this *slut* ... You sleep around with everyone and you don't even *care*. Sometimes it makes me feel cheap ... like he took advantage of me, or something. So that is why I always want to be in control ... [Dudu, MP]

As Dudu's comments suggest [see Extract 18 and 19], young men play a role in the 'social punishment' imposed upon girls who enjoy their sexuality, or who try to take the lead in the sexual arena. A study of young British men (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Scott & Thomson, 1994b) reports that when young men experience vulnerability in sexual encounters – for example, when a partner does not conform to cultural ideals of subordinated femininity, posing a threat to conventional masculinity – they manage such threats through, amongst other things, 'performance stories' and competition with peers, and wielding the weapon of attributing a negative reputation upon the woman. Similarly, Shefer and Foster (2001) report, in a local South African setting, that young men managed threats to conventional masculinity posed by young women who 'take the lead' in the sexual arena by projecting any damage to the male ego onto women as denigrating and undermining of her femininity (for example, through dealing with 'embarrassment' by labelling a partner a 'bitch'). As these studies highlight, this has the effect of reinforcing and reproducing masculine and feminine "positions of agency and object, of doing sex and being done to" (Holland et al., 1996, p. 159).

The accounts suggest, further, that over time, young women *learn* to censor their own sexuality: they learn to perceive their partners as agents ("playboys") and themselves as objects ("he took advantage of me"), and their "feelings" become circumscribed in negative terms that are self-denigrating and undermining of their femininity ("you start feeling bad about yourself"; "this person thinks you were this slut"; "it makes me feel cheap"). Again, as in the extracts presented earlier in this section (see Extracts 12; 13; 14), girls who are 'taken advantage of' or 'used' by boys are constructed as *responsible* for their victimisation. Girls learn that any attempt to resist objectification will be met with internally- and externally- imposed punishment, which are mutually reinforcing. Dudu's accounts [Extract 18; 19] illustrate the double-bind wherein a young woman may find herself: on the one hand, she wants to be "in control" of her sexual encounters, so that she can avoid being "taken advantage of" (i.e. being an object of male sexuality), but, on the other hand, taking such control requires giving

up sexual freedom, and the enjoyment (“fun”) that accompanies this - which ultimately denies a sense of explicit subject-hood.

3. Girls 'saving themselves': Constructions of virginity

Part three deals with young women's talk surrounding virginity, focussing particularly upon the (gendered) meaning and value that young women attach to virginity. This section explores young women's rationalisations for delaying first sexual intercourse, and highlights some of the discursive incoherence and contradiction circumscribing virginity and its loss for young women. This component of the analytical chapter sets the stage for part four, which explores young women's accounts of first sex.

Virginity, gender and meaning

Extract 1

Every time when you sleep with someone, you give them a piece of yourself that you don't even realise ... a small piece of you that you won't even *think* you *need* ... One of the things I thought about last night when I went to bed: if I had to not be a virgin today, what would I have been doing? ... And at the end of the day, I'm glad that I'm *this* person ... I'm grateful for the fact that *I am who I am*; I'm not half who I am; or - there're not pieces of me missing. Like, the whole picture is complete, I think. [Geraldine, OV]

It is well-recognised that, in addition to reflecting a physiological condition, virginity, as a concept, is laden with symbolic meaning; furthermore, responses to the meanings of virginity and its loss are socially gendered, and differently embodied for men and women (Holland et al., 1996; Thompson, 1984; Weiss & Rao Gupta, 1998; Weiss et al., 1996). In previous generations, gendered notions of virginity were institutionally linked to marriage, paternity and transfer of property over generations; nowadays, however, young people are exposed to a multitude of pressures to become sexually active, and the age of first intercourse appears to be declining (Holland et al., 1996; Moore & Rosenthal, 1998). Nonetheless, virginity, as a construct, remains starkly gendered. Young women's talk reflects and represents socially-gendered responses to virginity:

Extract 2

When you're married, or when you're involved with someone, they [men] always expect you to be a virgin; but it's ok for them *not* be one ... I think for men and women it's like different, you know? They're ... not so the virgin type, and the pure clean type as women ... You don't see men as losing anything ... and they often compare with each other how many people they've been with, or how many girls they *can* sleep with; like a competition or something. And with women, it's like you're labelled as being slutty and dirty and sleeping around with people, you know. [Natalie, OV]

As Holland and colleagues (1996) observe, men gain and women lose out in the prevailing construction of first intercourse. These authors argue that what men 'lose' during first intercourse is their *inexperience*, with the sexual act signally an achievement of manhood, and an embodiment of 'proper' masculinity. In this regard, as Natalie points out, "you don't see men as losing anything" [Extract 2]. As other studies have found, family, social and peer influences support a scenario wherein sexual experience is seen as a desired goal for young men, and linked to their developing concept of masculinity (Barker & Ricardo, 2005; Reddy, 2003; Weiss & Rao Gupta, 1998; Weiss et al., 1996) and virginity can even be regarded as a stigma in young men (Barker & Ricardo, 2005; Reddy, 2003). On the other hand, virginity in young women is regarded as a virtue, and confers social respect. As Natalie's account suggests [Extract 2], for young women, first sex signifies negatively: it signals a failure to embody socially-prescribed versions of femininity – centring on purity and chastity – and invites social censure.

I want to save myself for my husband

Local and international literature suggests that the idea of 'waiting' for marriage or true love and commitment prevails as a theoretical ideal amongst teenage girls (Thompson, 1984; Reddy, 2003). A number of young women who professed themselves to be 'virgins' proudly proclaimed to be 'saving themselves' for marriage, or remaining 'pure' for a future husband:

Extract 3

That is, I think that is one of my biggest values that I have: I believe that I want to save myself for my husband. I don't believe that someone must have sex before [marriage]; it's just not right ... it's just

something that was ... *instilled* in me ... I'm like forever worried about rape – because I, I have like this whole strong belief in being a virgin, and if I'm raped then ... [Nerissa, OV]

Extract 4

Most girls have sex to have a good time; to enjoy themselves. *Not thinking* about the consequences. And they don't realise the mistake they're making, because one day when they're married, what will they have to offer their husbands? ... I'm proud of who I am, because I know that I have a lot more to offer the person that *I'm* going to settle with than what [they] have to give. [Karen, OV]

Here, virginity features as a gift in a young woman, one that should be preserved to bestow upon or offer to a husband. While some studies suggest that the belief that first sex should wait for marriage is no longer widely held, religiosity factors into this scenario: both local and international literature suggests that young people who adhere to religious values, whatever the religion, are less likely to be sexually active (Moore & Rosenthal, 1998; Nicholas & Durrheim, 1995; Venter, as cited in Eaton et al., 2003). In South Africa, the intention to abstain altogether from sex until marriage is expressed by a small minority, mostly young women (often from conservative backgrounds), and rarely by young men (Reddy, 2003; Venter, as cited in Eaton et al., 2003). Young women's talk surrounding pre-marital sexual abstinence is often made with reference to Christian values and moral codes.

Extract 5

As a Christian, it is like you should be married [to have sex] ... It's like *your* morals and who *you* are ... I think we would feel a total regret if we just went and slept around ... We just don't feel *comfortable* just sleeping around. [Helen, FH]

Extract 6

My thing is that, the Bible, it's not like I'm trying to preach to anybody, but, for me, I would like myself to remain pure for someone *some day*, and I wouldn't like the guy ... to have slept around with thirteen thousand girls, to put it that way ... [Geraldine, OV]

While some young women express the hope that their future husbands would be deferring sex until marriage, most do not voice the view that such standards can be expected of young men. As extract 6 suggests, while young women may uphold pre-

marital sexual abstinence as a desired and desirable goal, they do not appear to project a similar standard upon their future husbands. Reddy (2003) observed a similar discrepancy in South African girls' expectations.

The virginity 'bargain'

For the majority of young women participating in this study, however, 'love' and commitment appears to have taken the place of marriage as a legitimising function for sex (see also Holland et al., 1990). Nonetheless, first sex is not something that is taken lightly: it is loaded with symbolic weight, and anticipated in terms of a transaction or "bargain" (Thompson, 1984, p. 364). Thompson (1984, p. 364) contends that:

the intensity of the bargaining over virginity can be understood as deriving from the belief, or suspicion, that first intercourse is an absolute test of the chances for a committed relationship and a test of self worth. To get an accurate reading on these questions, one must do more than bargain: one must give it up ... Here is the paradox: these questions can only be addressed by having sex. Yet in having sex a girl risks what she thinks may be the only thing she has to gamble. And the refrain still runs in the back of her head: once he gets what he wants ... (Thompson, 1984, p. 364)

Within this bargain, as reflected in the extracts presented below, a young women 'gives up' or 'loses' a part of her 'self' in exchange for the affirmation of a relationship, and a partner's love and commitment:

Extract 7

I think that ... for the first time, you must love that person, because it's a big part of your life that you're giving up. It's like you're giving that person something that nobody else could take from you, unless you let them. And, seeing that you trust the person now, you let them take it from you. [Lisa, FH]

Extract 8

Faiza: I think it *should* take the relationship to a next level, but I also think for the person, you sort of lose a part of yourself, and you give a part of yourself to that person, because, you know, something that was pure, it's not *not* pure, but it's like, but I think you sort of give a part of *you* to that person, and that person will for always have it, because he was your first, and everything ...

- LK: How do you know when you're ready to give a part of yourself, make that commitment to someone else?
- Faiza: I think the relationship firstly needs to be very stable, and *permanent*; it should be like a permanent relationship. It shouldn't be like a little fling. Because then you're not really giving yourself wholly and fully to that person; you're just doing it ... because of the, you know, the thrill of the moment I suppose. But if you, if you do it, and you're in a permanent relationship when you do it, and then it sort of, there's a whole lot of emotions attached, so it's more sentimental I suppose.
- [Faiza, OV]

The notion that first sex requires running the risk of giving up the only thing a young women has to gamble features powerfully in young woman's accounts, as does the fear that "once he gets what he wants" she may not be rewarded by his love and commitment. One young woman maintained:

Extract 9

Being a virgin is not much of a pressure; I chose to do it, it's my responsibility ... When you have sex for the first time, it's basically committing yourself to the world. To the world and to your partner, saying, I did this, and I'm proud that I did it. But, if it turns out that this guy is just a big fraud, just going around sleeping with everyone he can find, then you gave up your innocence to a monster. So, rather just wait, find the right guy who would actually be faithful to you, and then sleep with him. You have to know that he loves you, before you commit to him.

[Reflecting upon a prior relationship with a young man, this young woman continued:]

It's from him that I decided to wait. See, he only went out with me for sex ... because he wanted to sleep with me. And when I found out, I confronted him about it; I told him I don't want to do it; I want to wait. He kept *pushing* me to sleep with him and everything, but I finally had enough, and I told him that I don't really like the fact that he's only trying to sleep with me; if he *really* loves me then he'll respect my wishes. So, he broke up with me for that, because all he wanted was sex ... He didn't really love me, he just wanted sex.

If I had slept with him ... it would have torn me apart. He would have taken a part of me then ... I could have slit my wrists! I could have jumped off a building; I could have started doing drugs, started doing really bad stuff ... It goes back to the whole psychological thing: I mean, you feel you love this person; this person tells you that he loves you and everything; you sleep together ... And then you find out that he's been playing you. And then you're so depressed about it and everything – because you *slept* with him! You *loved* him; you even *told* him that. You *gave* him a part of your

innocence; you *gave* him your innocence. And he threw it away. I mean, some girls *kill* themselves over broken hearts ... [Sally, FH]

As this account suggests, for a young woman, virginity and its loss is a matter of maintaining integrity within and across a variety of intersecting relationships: her relationship with herself and her body, her relationship with her partner, and her position in society more generally. This young woman's reflection upon what can happen should the 'bargain' go wrong is centred upon violent, (self-)destructive consequences. Young women often idealise and romanticise married heterosexuality, construing this as the only sure safeguard against the "bargain" going wrong:

Extract 10

I make a choice literally not to [have sex before marriage]. I've set that boundary: I want it *only when I'm married*. I'd rather my husband, someone who is so precious to me, have that thing that is precious to *me*. I know if I get married to someone it's a *helluva* lot like more stabilising. I couldn't bear for me to give something so *precious* - so *intimate* - to some arbitrary guy. And then he just disappears, you know? I couldn't bear ... [Kate, FH]

Extract 11

I would rather be married, and have sex then, than just sleep around with some arbitrary people ... I mean, it's different if you're *married* to a guy, because there is that commitment. Otherwise... *he* could sleep around, and not feel guilty at all, because you're not like tied to that person. ... And you financially aren't joined together ... And ... by the *court* it's not recognised as a partnership, you know. And that's what marriage is about; it's a partnership, you know? ... And you don't *always* know something about someone you're going out with; you don't know *everything* about him. Whereas in a *marriage*, you *need* to know everything: because there's that whole trust and honesty and stuff going on ... [Helen, FH]

Girls under pressure to 'lose it': The virgin/whore wars

Despite the fact that young women are situated within a cultural climate that encourages them to cultivate an image of sexual innocence, sub-cultural pressures clearly operate in the opposite direction. These sub-cultural pressures intersect with dominant cultural norms in a manner that renders young women's decision-making and experiences around 'saving it' and 'losing it' fraught with contradiction.

Heterosexual social attachments

Irrespective of the pressure upon young women to guard their virginity closely, young women are nonetheless under considerable pressure to attach themselves to young men socially in the interest of social inclusion amongst female peers. Young women who do not have boyfriends feel “left out”, “outcast”, “lonely ... maybe no one wants me”, “alone”, “depressed”, “excluded”, lacking in “self-confidence”, and expendable when in the company of their ‘paired off’ peers:

Extract 12

When you are with your friends and when your friends are with their boyfriends, and you are along, you don’t have a boyfriend, you will be the outcast: you are not there with your boyfriend; why must you be there? [Xoliswa, MP]

According to young women, the desire to “fit in”, “be cool” and “be part of a certain clan” – and a desire to escape from feelings of inadequacy and exclusion, experienced when in the company of ‘paired off’ peers – leads to a scenario where “if a guy comes to you, you *grab* the opportunity to have your own boyfriend – just to fit in”. Social conformity and acceptance are not the only ‘goals’ of heterosexual coupling: for both young women and men, having a boyfriend or girlfriend – particularly one who is good-looking – is a marker of social status and success. Nonetheless, there is a clear gendering in the status conferred through heterosexual coupling:

Extract 13

If the guy has this very fine girl, and she’s sexy ... and he’s having sex with her, he gets status ... And girls also get status from their boyfriends if they have a hunk or something ... So it’s basically their *egos* ... To them, a boyfriend is just like an *accessory*. Like, you know, you buy yourself a *bag* or a *bangle* or something, something to make you look good or nice or pretty or something. Like, just another accessory that brings them across as being cool, confident or sexy or something ... [Karen, OV]

As this accounts suggests, a young man gains status through a *sexual* relationship with a partner, while a young woman gains status through her *social* relationship with a partner. Public displays of a social attachment to a young man becomes part of the production of femininity, bound up in practices of bodily ornamentation (see Bartky,

1990) whereby a young woman makes herself “look good and nice and pretty” [Extract 13]. A young woman is deficient if she does not make the final implementation of bodily ornamentation of a good-looking young man at her side: this stands as final confirmation that a young woman has succeeded in the production of a form of femininity that satisfies the male gaze. Within this framework, ‘getting’ and ‘keeping’ a man might become contingent upon satisfying him sexually, in order to achieve a mutually-beneficial relationship.

Virginity as stigma

Over and above the value attached to forming social relationships with young men (which can become contingent upon sexual access), there is clearly pressure upon young women to gain sexual experience in its own right. Experiential knowledge of sex is an important commodity of inclusion amongst female peers. Information surrounding sex is hard for girls to access from peers without simultaneous pressure to experiment. Young women’s position in relation to peers is organised around a set of rules that dictate who has the right to speak. Those young women who have sexual experience become the gatekeepers of sexual knowledge. As this young woman relates:

Extract 14

They didn’t want to talk – because they say I don’t know nothing about sex. So I must not ask them until I have got experience. And I have to share my experience with them. So they said they don’t like to talk with someone who don’t have an experience. Because they won’t be able to advise her when she has a problem ... They also have the styles for doing sex. So I don’t know any styles ... They wanted me to have sex. They didn’t want to talk about sex when they were with me. So they didn’t want to talk their, their news with me. Because they think I know nothing about sex. It made me feel bad. And they tried to make me do it. [Zodwa, MP]

Girls who do not have sexual experience can be excluded from conversation on this subject matter by those who do, and inclusion in and information on such matters is only given on condition that one has experience of one’s own to “share” or exchange, or offer as “advice” to other girls, or can provide “styles” of having sex [Extract 14]. Sexually inexperienced girls are presumed to “know nothing” [Extract 14] about sex,

and are made to feel inferior. Resonating with other South African findings (MacPhail & Campbell, 2001; Wood et al., 1998), the young women who participated in this study often maintained that girls who have no sexual experience tend to be excluded from conversation, on the grounds that they are still 'children' [see extract 15, below]. While in their relationships with adults adolescent girls are told to guard their virginity closely, they experience pressure to the contrary amongst peers.

Extract 15

You actually feel less than them; because they are like saying: no, you are still a kid, and they are adults and stuff. And you actually want to be on the same level as they are, because whenever if they are going somewhere, they like, no, we're not going with *kids*; we're older than you ... Even if they're younger than you by age, since they're not virgins, they're older than you. Now you're this *kid*, you mustn't go with them; you mustn't go walk around with them at school or something, because you're this *kid*; they don't want to talk about things with the *kid* ... [Dudu, MP]

Extract 16

I think the status is more emphasised on *not* being a virgin ... if you are a virgin, then you're like looked down at – what's wrong with you? Something must be wrong; the guys don't want you ... [Karen, OV]

As these accounts suggest, within the female peer group, virginity is a stigmatising signifier – of childhood status ("you are still a kid, and they are adults" [Extract 15]) and of being undesirable to the opposite sex ("the guys don't want you" [Extract 16]). This latter construction reinforces young women's status as objects of male desire, and further inhibits young women from viewing themselves as desiring sexual subjects. Open displays of knowledge and experience in the realm of sex (which are viewed negatively by adults) are, within the peer group, construed as important in gaining acceptance and status, and become markers of social success. While adolescent girls feel it is necessary to display an image of virginity and sexual innocence in their relationships with adults, amongst their female peers there is a contradictory motivation to display sexual experience, and hide evidence of 'innocence' and inexperience:

Extract 17

[Girls] don't want to mention the fact that they're virgins and everything, because that will brand them a loser: it's one of the unwritten social rules, that if you're a virgin, then you're a loser ...
[Sally, FH]

In both scenarios, girls can feel compelled to present themselves to others in a manner that misrepresents their actual degree of experience in the realm of their sexuality. One young woman related that even her closest friends who, during intimate conversation, maintain that they are "proud to be virgins", teased her in public about her lack of sexual experience. She provides her own interpretation of this contradiction in the extract below:

Extract 18

I just think they also feel slightly insecure about being a virgin, and everything, and then take out their frustration on me sometimes, yes ...
I think they also feel pressure, the pressure of having to sleep with someone. [Sally, FH]

Discursive contradiction and incoherence

Despite a sub-culture that valorises young women's sexual experience and attaches stigma to virginity, it is evident that the status of this culture is still subordinate to dominant cultural norms that dictate a reverse set of norms and values. Some of the discursive contradictions surrounding gender and sexual experience are evident in the following extract, drawn from a discussion on 'why girls typically have sex':

Extract 19

Sally: I think what, what they're trying to do, they're trying to *stand out*; show them that they are brave – or something. They have to show off to get somewhere in the community, so ...
LK: Who are the people they are showing off for?
Sally: Their *friends*, and guys – so that they know: I'm here, look at me ...
Lisa: To become popular or something ... I think that a lot of girls think that if you want to be popular you must lose your virginity or something, I think because they think it's cool to sleep around with people ... Some people, even though they don't want to, just to be popular will sleep with somebody. And they'll tell their friends, and

- almost everybody they know, who they come across, they tell.
- Sally: It makes you more – *manly*. More, more *acceptable*. Girls think it's a good thing that you've slept with a guy, or something ... Probably because it just shows people that they *know pain* and all those things; and that they've *been through it* and everything. But, personally, I just think it's a way of telling people that you're a slut. I mean, sleeping around with so many guys, obviously will brand you a ho [whore] ... And you don't want to become a slut, so ...
- Kate: I'd rather not go with it ...

[Focus Group, FH]

This extract suggests some of discursive constraints within which young women are situated when negotiating their sexuality. On a superficial level, it might appear that young women's experiences of sexuality are constituted within a cultural climate that is more sexually liberated and less gender-differentiated than has previously been the case: the configuration of sex as an achievement of adult and social status is no longer available only to young men, and young women may deploy 'performance' stories as a way of gaining social status amongst peers in a similar way that males do, and have previously done. Nonetheless, sex as a rite of passage into adulthood remains a distinctly masculinised concept: young women are made paradoxically "more *manly*" [Extract 19] by virtue of their sexual achievements. There is still little evidence that 'sex as an achievement of adulthood' can be comfortably equated with feminine embodiment, and active displays of female sexuality is still figured as inviting social censure and negative labels, such as "ho" [whore] and "slut" [Extract 19].

It is also clear that young women are complicit in reproducing the gender 'double standard' that surrounds sexual behaviour: despite the fact that young women are under significant pressure from female peers to display sexual experience, the female peer group plays a powerful role in 'punishing' young women who display their sexuality too obviously.

Extract 20

- Xoliswa: When you are at your friends place, that's where you all, that's where you talk about it – 'oh, I had a great time with him, and did that and that and that' – that's

where you get open and talk with your friends – like *anything you want to talk about*. [Consensual noises]

Dudu: Because it's the part of your life where you feel free ... to talk about *anything* [consensual noises] ... But *also*, if you get pregnant, that is the place where you fear most: what are your friends going to say? They're going to gossip about *you*, because there you've been gossiping about everyone else.

[Focus Group, MP]

Extract 21

Natalie: What I sometimes don't understand is, *they* [female peers] may be the people that encourage you to like, they didn't actually force you, ok, open your legs, but ... they the people that sometimes encourage you, *no, do it, because it's nice and that!* And when you fall pregnant, then *they* the people that actually turn their backs on you.

Nerissa: It's actually two-faced ...

Karen: Or they tell you, *oh it's nice*, and they pretend like they've had sex, and they just push you forward enough that you'll go through with it. And then, you've had sex at the end of the day, and you fall pregnant, and then they say: *oh, but I forget to tell you – I'm a virgin*. Sometimes friends also do that.

Natalie: *You have to choose them really well!* Because if you *don't...*

Karen: And don't confide *everything* now; because sometimes the relationship goes sour, and then she'll use it against you!

Nerissa: It's happened before! It's happened before ...

Karen: Friendships, they very complicated ...

[Focus Group, OV]

In the peer group context, girls are under pressure to say 'yes' to sex: but not *too* loudly. Conformity to peer pressures surrounding sex (in the aid of making and maintaining connections) can result, ironically, in peer group censorship. Girls who "open their legs" [Extract 21] under pressure from friends can then be turned upon, become the subject of gossip, and subject to exclusion. Those who have too many boyfriends, too much sex, or fall pregnant, run the risk of becoming objects of negative gossip and speculation amongst peers: such girls lose the position that deems them the right to speak, and are relegated to one that produces them as an object of talk. This scenario also constrains young women from drawing upon their peers as confidants and a source of support. As the extracts above suggest, despite the pressure

upon young women to publicise their sexual experiences amongst peers, and despite the fact that relationships with female peers constitute an important site wherein young women can potentially speak openly about their sexual practices and even pleasures [Extract 20], open and honest discussions may be inhibited by fears that one's confidants may later take this information and "use it against you" [Extract 21]. Furthermore, the promise of sexual pleasure ("do it, because it's nice" [Extract 21]) is juxtaposed against the potential for later censure. While young women might to be critical of the fickle gossip that takes place amongst girls, it is also clear that participating in such gossip is an important part of maintaining peer-group connections; and young women are conscious of their own complicity in setting themselves up as potential objects of gossip ("if you get pregnant ... they're going to gossip about *you*, because there you've been gossiping about everyone else" [Extract 20]).

The division between behaviour that confers reward and, alternatively, sanction in the peer group is a fine line to negotiate. Status and power amongst female peers appears to be held by those who have the right to wield the weapon of a negative reputation over her counterparts. This power can operate in a bi-directional manner: girls can be subject to negative labelling whether or not they guard their virginity closely, and evidence of envy and inferiority may be characteristic of the experiences of both 'virgins' and 'non-virgins'. This is evident in the following two extracts [Extract 22; 23], drawn from one young woman's experience:

Extract 22

Last year, Anita [a classmate] was really rude; she called me a nun. I'm like, why? And she's: well, you're still a *virgin* ... I mean, just thinking about her calling me a nun because I'm a virgin made me feel like a loser, and I wanted to lose my virginity. [Sally, FH]

Speaking of the same class-mate, this young woman later added:

Extract 23

She even told me that she's jealous of the fact that I haven't slept with anyone. Because she gave up that innocence *long* ago. But I still have mine, because I *chose* to wait. So, I even told her that: I wouldn't go sleeping with *any* guy I can find. And that got her really angry, and she

just stormed off ... I think she was trying to compliment me and insult me at the same time ... [Sally, FH]

Here, a young woman harnesses the contradictory standards circumscribing virginity and its loss as a defensive strategy. The energy that young women divest towards protecting their reputations and policing the sexuality of their female peers serves to reproduce, rather than challenge, the traditional 'double standard'.

4. Girls 'losing it': Experiences of first sex

The analysis now turns to explore young women's accounts of their first sexual experiences. 'First sex' is "an event that is frequently 'tabulated', but rarely investigated at the level of subjective experience" (Tolman & Diamond, 2001, p. 57). Nonetheless, international and local research (e.g. Holland et al., 1996; Lesch & Kruger, 2004; Thompson, 1984; 1990; Thomson & Holland, 1998) has started to embark on the project of exploring this event on the level of young people's subjective experience.

Explanatory narratives on first sex

Extract 1

It just happened ... with my experience, it just happened. It just happened. [Xoliswa, MP]

Extract 2

I just don't know, man ... I just fell in love with him. [Nomhle, MP]

Extract 3

I wanted to wait for the right time to have sex ... But it was hard. Because [my friends] said: 'boys want to have sex, they don't want to wait. When boys have a girlfriend, they want to have sex ... You're lying; you're having sex!' - things like that ... they didn't believe me.

I don't know really ... it wasn't me; it was him. He was like, kissing me, and then he asked me, *why not?* And I didn't have an answer. Like, it just happened. I don't know ... [Zuki, MP]

Extract 4

My friends were telling me ... having sex proves that you love your boyfriend. So that's why I did it: I was proving how serious he is about me, you know? I was trying to satisfy – him. [Somi, MP]

Extract 5:

I did *not* think about it ... I wasn't ready, right to have sex. You know? But I was trying to make my boyfriend happy ... He wasn't giving me any pressure. He was saying that he love me, but I *have* to – for him. [Zodwa, MP]

Extract 6

He was pushing for a long time, but I was like, no, no, no, no ... And I eventually gave in after about three months. But I mean, I'd known him three years before that ... I loved him so much, and believed him, that he loved me, and I was so fearful of losing him ... I was aware that I was dropping my standards; really, I was. And – but then I kept judging myself ... undermining – no, no, it's all ok; it's fine; it's fine ... [Laura, FH]

Extract 7

All of my friends were having sex. That was the main thing that was pulling me to do that ... they were stressing me – talking about sex and all of that. And they were like, 'Dudu, we like girls who have sex' ... Peer pressure is the *most* powerful thing. It's more like fitting in: you want to fit in. So, if people like people who are not virgins, it's better for you to not be a virgin so that you can fit in ... So, I thought, what the hell, I must just do it and get it over with ... It just happened. It happened – because of friends. [Dudu, MP]

Young women's explanatory accounts on first sex are highly varied, as exemplified in these extracts. Nonetheless, there are a number of common contours, which are discussed below.

An absence of female agency

Initiating open discussions with young women around their first sexual experiences was not always met in a forthcoming manner. Many of the young women claimed that they did not remember the experience clearly, or that they could not explain what had motivated their experiences of first sex. First sex is frequently described as something that these young women “don't know” [Extract 2; 3] how to explain: it “just happened” [Extract 1; 3; 7] rather than following from a conscious decision (“I did *not* think about it” [Extract 5]). In this regard, young women appear to find it difficult to articulate – or experience – their own agency in first sexual encounters.

This absence of agency may be linked with the absence of pre-coital desire evident in these accounts. In some cases, young women explicitly claim that they were having sex before they were “ready”: that is, before desire is aroused. Why, then, do young women have sex? These young women apparently chose to have sex because they were giving in to (subtle or overt) pressure from a partner, giving way to “love”, or

because of a combination of peer pressure, and a desire to take on the challenge of sex as a 'rite of passage'. Why such a pervasive absence of desire? Thompson (1984) suggests that this absence of desire may not be developmental, but a function of a lack of foreplay, and the belief that a girl contemplating sex does not have the right to desire.

Negative power

Discursively-speaking, women are generally positioned as the objects of sex (the person who has sex done to them), whereas men approach sex from the position of sexual actor (the person who does sex) (Gavey, 1992; Holland et al., 1996; Thomson & Holland, 1998). Within this scenario, the only type of power that young women can harness takes the negative form of (initial) resistance to male sexual advances. This is illustrated in Laura's narrative: "He was pushing for a long time, but I was like saying no, no, no ... And I eventually gave in after three months" [Extract, 6]. Research suggests that, for young women, saying 'no' is an important part of the process leading up to sexual consent. Within the romantic script, sex is constructed as initiated by men, against female resistance: young women are "positioned to resist, slowly cede bodily territory, and finally consent to intercourse" (Holland et al., 1996, p. 153). A young woman who initiates sex, or gives in too quickly to pressure can risk signalling to a partner that she is 'easy' or promiscuous, and contradict claims to virginity (Holland et al., 1996; Lesch & Kruger, 2004; Thomson & Holland, 1998). This form of female resistance reinforces – and can even be considered a prerequisite for – male agency in heterosex, in that it compounds the sense of achievement that a young man experiences when his partner eventually consents (Holland et al., 1996).

Consent or coercion?

In a number of the accounts, it is difficult to distinguish whether first sex was consensual or coercive. Studies suggest that women, young and old, in an undesirous state, find it hard to distinguish between choice and coercion, and are not always certain of how to make a meaningful distinction between the two (Gavey, 1992; Thompson, 1990). Similarly, other studies find that young women may fail to recognise or name coercion when sex takes place with someone who they 'love' or

have a steady relationship with (Thompson, 1990; Wood et al., 1998). Young women's accounts suggest that sex is expected by young men in a romantic relationship (an idea that is perpetuated by female peers) making it difficult to refuse sex. This can arise in paradoxical accounts such as, "He wasn't giving me any pressure. He was saying that he love me, but I *have* to – for him" [Extract 5].

Self-surveillance

Being positioned as an object of male desire can render young women passive in heterosexual sexual relationships, regardless of whether the male partner exerts force or pressure. Tolman and Debold (as cited in Tolman, 2000) observe a pattern in girls' sexual development wherein they learn to know themselves from the perspective of men, as an object of male desire, thereby losing touch with their own bodily feelings and desires. Being an object of male desire can effectively silence female desire, and lead to self-surveillance.

Thomson and Holland (1998) find that self-surveillance can be manifested as 'nurturance' (fulfilling the needs of a partner) and/or 'pragmatism' (accepting that consent to sexual experience may be easier than offering resistance). Self-surveillance that takes the form of 'nurturance' is clearly evident in statements such as "I was trying to satisfy him" [Extract 4] and "I wasn't ready, right to have sex. But I was trying to make my boyfriend happy" [Extract 5]. As in the latter extract, self-surveillance that is conducted in the interest of fulfilling a partners' needs can be powerful enough to override a young women's conscious knowledge of not being "ready" or "right" to have sex. Self-surveillance taking the form of pragmatism is less explicit within these accounts, but can manifest itself in instances wherein a woman perceives that 'saying no' may have no effect, and that sex will proceed regardless of consent (Gavey, 1992). When presented with a vignette about a girl whose boyfriend wishes to have sex against her will, the participants surmised that she might consent to sex, nonetheless, "because she is scared maybe of the boyfriend raping her" [Focus Group, OV]. Here, it appears that sex will be the outcome regardless of whether a young woman consents: and not signalling non-consent may be a pragmatic strategy for avoiding violent force (Wood et al., 1998), and/or a symbolic means to avoid whatever follows from being construed as rape (Gavey, 1992).

Within these narratives, there is little sense that the male partner was concerned with whether his girlfriend actually wanted to have sex. His own desire is presented as reason enough for her to consent: "It's wasn't me, it was him. He was like kissing me, and then he asked, *why not?* And I didn't have an answer" [Extract 3]. Noteworthy here is the fact that neither this young woman nor her partner identifies *her* desire – or lack thereof – as a significant factor mediating the couple's decision to have sex. In the absence of a discursive position available to a (young) woman to construe sex as a response to her own desire, "consent can be a very passive action" (Gavey, 1992, p. 348).

Mutual consent

Only one young woman [Jane, FH] participating in this study spoke about her first sexual encounter as a definitively mutual decision between herself and her partner. What is noteworthy, in this instance, is that she described her relationship with her boyfriend as a friendship, characterised by mutual and open communication about matters that were of important to each of them. Jane explained that she and her partner had communicated with one another about sex for a prolonged period of time before coming to the mutual decision that "we were both ready". Additionally, both Jane and her boyfriend were "virgins", and embarking upon the experience of first sex together. Other research has suggested that, in the context of long-term relationships and friendships, and when both partners are "in the same boat" in terms of sexual experience (i.e. virgins), first sex can be characterised by greater equality and communication (Holland et al., 1996; Thomson & Holland, 1998).

The majority of the remaining young women who had experiences of first sex to relate were involved with young men who already had some degree of sexual experience. In such instances, additional subtle pressure to consent can be in operation, such as the perceived need to satisfy a boyfriend in the manner that he has been by previous girlfriends. Such ideas are not always verbally communicated by a boyfriend, as in this young women's experience:

Extract 8

He didn't force me; he told me that if I didn't want to, just say I don't want to. I must just do it when I feel like doing it ... I must not do it just because his other girlfriends did ... [Phumla, MP]

However, Phumla later found her boyfriend in bed with another young woman – which she interpreted as a sign that it was necessary for her to consent to sex if he was to remain faithful to her. She framed her consequent decision to sleep with him in terms of her desire to regain her partners' exclusive commitment to their relationship, and reclaim his "love".

So, how was it for her?

In the following discussion, the participants' characterisations of first sex are presented. While, for analytical purposes, these have been presented separately from the participants' explanatory narratives on first sex, young women's experiences of sex need to be understood as inevitably related to the conditions under which sex is initiated and entered into. Specifically, the discourses which undermine young women's experiences of agency and volition at first sex – and which contribute to their objectification – grant young women a limited framework within which to interpret and make sense of their bodies and experiences in sex.

The young women participating in this study rarely framed their experience of sex in positive terms. Resonating with findings from other studies (Lesch & Kruger, 2004; Thompson, 1990) the emotions that the young women articulated were typically those regarded as negative in nature, centring on guilt, shame, fear and disappointment, while embodied experiences centred pervasively upon pain. While romantic love was often the means through which the participants justified their engagement in sexual activity, their actual experiences of sex often did not appear to meet their romantic expectations.

Extract 9

I thought it would be a nice thing, like, that it was romantic and all those things. But I didn't feel that – I only felt pain, myself ... It's not great. I don't know what's so special about it. It's nothing. It's not that

great ... On TV they make it very romantic and all those things ... When you see it on TV, it's like, a girl is being *cared for*, a guy is being romantic and all that ... That's what I *thought* relationships would be like ... But *here*, it just happens: done with, and then – over ... Some guy, comes to you, tells you that he loves you. He doesn't exactly mean that he loves you, wants a relationship with you. He just wants to have sex with you. And then it's over, just like that ... With boys here, sex is just an appetite. Just have sex; then it's done; he's done with you. [Xoliswa, MP]

This young women's romantic disillusionment may be interpreted within the cultural context in which 'proper sex' is conventionally and widely defined: "a specific version of heterosexual intercourse in which the man's penis penetrates the woman's vagina; it starts with his arousal and finishes with his climax" (Holland et al., 1996, p. 146). As Holland and colleagues (1996) suggest, the construction of intercourse as "a man's moment" leaves women to cope with experiences of first sex that "[do] not match their expectations of love, romance, or the earth moving" (p. 154). In some cases, expectations of relational intimacy and connection go unrealised due to overriding experiences of pain and shame:

Extract 10

Yoo! My body, it was *very painful*. Shoo ... and I only did it *once*. And after that I *never* did again ... I was very upset; couldn't even *look* him in the eye. Shoo. I feel like that I did something wrong ... I felt really bad. [Phumla, MP]

Other young women did not appear to have had any idea of what to expect going into the experience or, in retrospect, what to make of the experience:

Extract 11

It was a big thing. Because I didn't know how it was going to happen; how it was going to affect me ... It was scary ... But I didn't feel I'd wasted my time, you know? Because I was loving this person ... [Zuki, MP]

The only meaningful interpretation that this young woman can make of the experience is that it was not "wasted time" – because she loved her partner. The romance discourse circumscribing young women's experiences of first sex can thus contribute to a scenario wherein young women experience little sense of control both with

regards to the decision to have sex, as well as over the ensuing experience: here, being 'in love' requires passively enduring whatever consequences sex entails (see also Lesch & Kruger, 2004). Some young women made it clear that they had not enjoyed their experience of first sex, but their accounts are ambiguous surrounding what, precisely, had made the experience so unpleasant:

Extract 12

I don't quite remember it very well. But it was not nice. It was sore. And – for me, I'm really not into sex ... don't know what makes me uncomfortable, but – no. I can't do sex ... For me, it is bad to have sex. [Somi, MP]

For many young women, the experience of first sex is a complex process that extends beyond the act itself:

Extract 13

It was painful, man. I was *trying* ... Like, we did it, né? But I just said, no man, I'm scared, you know? It's painful for me ... I was crying you know? And I said: I'm sorry! And then he brought me home ... Hoo, I was scared! Yoo! When I got home: it's like they are seeing what I did ... you know? I was *scared*! ... I was scared! And then I go to my room; my grandmom, she was calling me ... [I thought] *she saw me! She saw me!* I was scared, man; I was scared. Because I really respect my grandparents ... I was scared, you know, *I was scared*. On the day after, I'll go in front of the mirror you know, look at my stomach ... I don't know what's happening ... [Nomhle, MP]

This young woman [Extract 13] narrates her induction into heterosexuality in terms of unintelligibility and fear: the phrase "I was scared" is reiterated eight times, and the narrative closes with "I don't know what's happening". She seems to lack a language through which she can make sense of the experience for herself, articulating only unintelligible fear (that both encompassed and extended beyond the act of sex itself) and pain. She felt the need to then apologise to her boyfriend for her bodily response of pain and tears. She imagined that her grandparents would be able to "see" tell-tale signs upon her that might betray the fact that she had engaged in sex – "it's like they are seeing what I did" – and, despite having used contraception, kept returning to the mirror to see if her stomach showed signs of pregnancy.

The participants rarely articulated their experiences of first sex in terms of embodied pleasure or enjoyment. Young women who were able to articulate pleasure often did so in brief terms, and then juxtaposed these accounts with ensuing experiences of self-denigration and fears of social retribution:

Extract 14

It was good; it was nice. But I was like scared to go home. Because my parents were going to ask, where was I? I didn't know – I felt ... dirty. I was angry at myself ... I actually hated myself. [Dudu, MP]

Some young women went to great lengths to qualify that any pleasure they had experienced was *not* of a physical nature, and even appeared to talk themselves out of the idea that they had enjoyed sex at all:

Extract 15

I *expected* it to be like the physical-type thing; you know, the pleasure and stuff? But actually, afterwards, I realised it's more of an *inside* connection, you know? To this person ... We found it – it bonded us; it really did. It was like, you know, now your soul is a part of another person; we're sharing each other's souls, kind of thing. And it's like, almost like an umbilical cord, you know? That's how it feels ... But sex, to me ... it's not like, it *is* sort of a pleasurable thing, but it's not *actually* ... On a physical level, it's not *pleasurable* – but *emotionally* ... I don't know how to explain: it doesn't *feel* nice, but ... We don't really have intercourse any more ... We just decided, maybe just wait until we married ... Because I kind of felt like, not that it's *wrong*, but just that it's not really *fun* to do it now. Because I mean, say now [we] do get married in the end, it's gonna be like: 'Uuurg! We've done it *before*. And it's so *boring* now', you know? And, it's more like for someone who's gonna have children. You know: if you're ready to have kids and stuff, that's basically you know, how sex is, you know? To have kids, and whatever ... So we both decided we're rather just gonna wait till we get married ... [Jane, FH]

This young woman [Extract 15] admits that she had expected to experience “physical” pleasure from sex; however, she explains that, with hindsight, she has realised that this expectation was unfounded. She appears to be at great pains to emphasise that, while she may have experienced some sort of pleasure during first sex, this was *not* of a ‘physical’ nature (“On a physical level, it's not *pleasurable* ... it doesn't *feel* nice”). ‘Pleasure’ is framed with reference to a spiritual bonding of souls, emotional connections, and maternal references to the mother-foetal umbilical

connection. During the course of the narrative, this young woman almost appears to talk herself out of framing the experience in any terms of pleasure (“it *is* sort of a pleasurable thing, but it’s not *actually*”). By the end of the narrative, Jane has thoroughly re-scripted her first sexual experience: sex is not for any kind of pleasure – its goal or purpose is solely for procreation within marriage (“that’s basically you know, how sex is, you know? To have kids”).

Other studies have found, similarly, that young women generally do not – or cannot – centre their narratives on sex around their own sexual pleasure (Lesch & Kruger, 2004; Thompson, 1984; 1990; Tolman, 1994; 2000; Tolman & Szalacha, 1999; Wood et al., 1998). Why so little pleasure? Thompson (1984) challenges the idea that this is simply a product of the fact that defloration is necessarily painful: as this researcher finds (resonating with my analyses of material presented before, and below) descriptions of early sexual experiences following initiation are generally also lacking in pleasure, and characterised by pain. Researchers provide a number of alternative hypotheses that might explain this scenario.

One hypothesis points to the cultural taboos that constrain young women from centring their sexual stories on pleasure: “It is far less taboo to say, ‘I had sex’, than to say, ‘I had pleasure’” (Thompson, 1984, p. 362). A number of feminist researchers have pointed out that young women are not given an authorised voice whereby they might articulate sex as something that they either enjoy or desire (Fine, 1988; Lesch & Kruger, 2004; Thompson, 1984; Tolman, 1994; 2000; Tolman & Szalacha, 1999; Vance, 1984). However, beyond the social taboos upon admitting to pleasure, research suggests that young women have difficulty experiencing either pleasure or desire in unfettered terms, given a cultural climate that always juxtaposes female sexual pleasure with danger (Fine, 1988; Tolman, 2000; Vance, 1984). Fine (1988) suggests that *ambivalence* is a corner-stone of young women’s experiences of sexuality: “The adolescent girl assumes a dual consciousness – at once taken with the excitement of actual/anticipated sexuality and consumed with anxiety and worry” (p. 35). Tolman (2000) finds that young women’s consciousness of both the pleasure and danger inherent in their sexual desire can arise in psychic conflict that makes it difficult for them to engage fully in the pleasurable sensations that they experience.

It is also evident that young women have little knowledge to draw upon as to the nature of female sexual pleasure that they might bring into their experiences of first sex. A discourse which centres female sexual desire and pleasure is virtually absent within adult communication around sex and, within the peer group, the gate-keeping at play regarding information concerning sexual matters – the “mystifying of sex” by peers (Wood et al., 1998, p. 236) – means that young women enter into sex relatively unprepared for what to expect. In such a context, young women are initiated into sexual matters by men, through the sexual act. As other research suggests, young women tend to learn about the practicalities of sex within their relationships with a sexual partner: who is likely to “show them the ropes” (Shefer & Potgieter, 2006, p. 113) in a manner that prioritises his pleasure, rather than hers. Even those young women who might have knowledge as to the ‘mechanisms’ of female sexual pleasure may feel the need to conceal this, given that they are taught that displays of sexual knowledge and experience are unfeminine (Weiss et al., 1996). Thompson (1984) suggests, further, that the absence of pleasure in young women’s sexual narratives may be a product of an implicit bargain, wherein a young woman forfeits her own pleasure in return for intimacy and commitment. A trade of pleasure for pleasure, wherein a girl enjoys sex as much as a boy does, may be seen as undercutting the potential of additional compensation through intimacy.

As Thomson and Holland (1998) point out, the processes through which young people learn about sex are the same processes through which they learn about being feminine and masculine; in this regard, young men and women arrive at their first sexual experience with very different expectations. The fact that young women perceived sex as something that is done ‘to them’, something over which they have little control, and simply have to endure, may also support a scenario wherein young women experience little sense of entitlement to negotiate their experiences in less painful, and more pleasurable terms.

What the hell! I did it, so let me continue ...

As a number of the preceding narratives suggest, young women’s experiences of first sex can be so fraught with ambivalence and confusion that they may discontinue

sexual relations entirely [e.g. Extract 10; 15]. Some young women, however, frame their sexual initiation in somewhat liberating (albeit ambivalent) terms, as in this case:

Extract 16

I sometimes regret it, that I had sex ... But I can't change it now ... When you lose your virginity, it's more like you've opened the gate to – now I'm this thing; I'm not a virgin – so I can sleep around with anyone that I want. But when you were still a virgin, you were like, no, I'm scared to do this; I shouldn't do it; it's wrong – or something. But now, once you're not, it's like, 'what the hell! I did it, so let me continue' ... [Dudu, MP]

This account suggests that, by losing her virginity, a young woman may be able to open up her body to use for her own desires: "I can sleep around with anyone that I want" (see also Holland et al., 1996). Here, virginity is constructed as a constraint upon her sexual freedom, and symbolising a weight of moral pressure. Nonetheless, the liberation that a young woman may experience through losing her virginity may be short-lived, given the mechanisms of social reward and sanction that operate between a young woman and her partner, and the wider peer group. 'Liberation' is further constrained by the fact that the self-surveillance circumscribing experiences of first sex continues into future sexual encounters and relationships. Young women who remain in a social relationship with their first sexual partners frame their continued sexual involvement with these young men in terms of a script that dictates male entitlement to continued sexual access: for example, Thandi [MP] said that she is "just doing it because I started it" and because she does not wish to "upset the relationship". Even those young women who had never engaged in sexual intercourse upheld the idea that male entitlement to sex is compounded after first sex, as in this case:

Extract 17

I think it does change the relationship: dramatically or drastically, it changes the relationship ... Before you had sex you like you could go to the movies, and you could kiss and hold hands. And like *now* when you do this kind of thing, it's always going to lead to the same thing at the end of the day. But back then, before you used to have, sex ... there weren't all these complications ... he wouldn't expect that ... So – there are certain expectations attached to sex, so ... There are. [Geraldine, OV]

Furthermore, within these and consequent relationships, communication on sex between partners still appears to be limited:

Extract 18

- Dudu: The thing is, we girls are very much shy to speak to our boyfriends about sex so even if you want to have sex, you just wait for him.
- LK: What would happen if you moved forward and asked him?
- Dudu: The *embarrassment on your face* when he says, 'I'm not ready' [Shrieks of laughter] It's *just too much to take!*
- Xoliswa: It's embarrassing!
- LK: So, in a relationship, the boyfriend tends to decide when sex happens?
- Dudu: It actually depends how is your boyfriend treating you. If he's like telling you ... 'oh, I think we should have sex' and whatever whatever, um, eventually you will fall down and want to satisfy him.

[Focus Group, MP]

The potential embarrassment that may accompany a young women's experience of initiating sex when a partner is "not ready" leads young women to defer the timing and frequency of sex to the male partner. As a corollary of this scenario, sex continues to be enacted upon the basis of male desire, irrespective of a young women's level of arousal.

Disruptive voices: Questioning and contesting androcentric sexuality

The material presented thus far should not be read as suggesting that young women are simply passive recipients of discourses that undermine their sexual agency.

'It's always satisfying the guy': Resistance to androcentric sexuality

As much of the preceding analysis has suggested, young women's sexual agency is not only constrained by overt male dominance, but also by the manner whereby young women's energy is siphoned off towards reproducing male power in heterosex. The insidious nature of this process can make it difficult for young women to recognise the mechanisms of male privilege: "The power of masculine privilege is often recognized by young women ... but the extent to which they contribute to the

reproduction of this power through their femininity is much less clear to them” (Holland et al., 1994a, p. 70). At rare moments, the participants could articulate the contributing role that young women play in their sexual subordination, as in this focus group discussion:

Extract 19

- Faiza: What I don't like is the attitude of girls towards sex: they always say, not, 'I'm going to have sex with him', or 'we had sex', but 'I *sexed him*'. So ... it was almost like, it was *for the guy* ...
- Elzane: It's always like satisfying the guy ...
- Natalie: If he's happy, I'm happy ... [derisive laugh]
- Karen: Excuse me, but if I'm not happy, then I'm not happy! There's nothing he can do about it!

[Focus Group, OV]

This extract, drawn from a focus group discussion, marks a moment of active resistance to androcentric sexuality: the participants challenge the idea that a woman's sexuality is (or should be) centred upon catering towards *his* sexual satisfaction, and the accompanying notion that women's sexual pleasure is a *derivative* of his satisfaction. Here, the privileging of male sexuality is disrupted, as young women assert and centre their own needs for sexual satisfaction. What is significant, however, is that the young women participating in this discussion were sexually abstinent, and not referring to actual experience/practice. Furthermore, these 'disruptive voices' were few and far between and, when articulated, were often tenuous. The participants who voiced resistance to androcentric sexuality at some points evidenced a tendency to silence their 'disruptive' voices at other points, and re-appropriate traditional versions of masculinity and femininity at other times. This process of silencing is illustrated in the extract presented below, drawn from an individual interview (post-dating the focus group) with Faiza, who instigated the discussion [Extract 19] presented before:

Extract 20

If you get into a relationship ... you're sort of expected to have sex if the guy wants to, you know ... And I suppose I am sort of hesitant about that, because I don't want to compromise myself for someone else. And I'm ... very pleasing – like, I always want people to be happy. So, I always sacrifice certain things for people. So I'm very

scared of going into a relationship, and then people expecting me to do things and then I know that I will probably compromise, so ... [Faiza, OV]

In the imagined scenario, Faiza [Extract 20] foresees “compromising [her]self” by having sex “if the guy wants it”. The significance of this extract is three-fold: first, it is taken-for-granted that sex is expected (of a woman, by a man) in a heterosexual relationship, and there is little room to say no; second, the difficulty of saying no is not conceived of in terms of male force, but rather in terms of her own anticipated receptivity to the imagined partner’s needs; and, third, Faiza does not envision the imaginary scenarios in terms of her own ‘wanting’ or desire – rather, the scenario is set up in terms of her response to a question that she has not posed herself.

Young women are nonetheless invested in conforming to traditional versions of femininity (even when, at other moments, they may draw upon discourses which challenge androcentric sexuality) and construct themselves as potentially responsive to male needs and the male ego. Noteworthy, at this point, is the fact that the participants voiced more resistance to androcentric sexuality during focus group discussions than within the individual interview context. This suggests that, within public discourse at least, young women are starting to feel empowered to challenge existing gender arrangements – even if this does not translate, yet, into a sense of empowerment within the privacy of the bedroom. The discrepancy between the views expressed in the group discussions and individual interviews respectively may also underscore why it is that sexually abstinent girls voiced more resistance to male power: it may be easier to uphold a feminist stance *outside* of a relationship than within one.

‘The Magic of Sex’: Girls express the desire for an erotic education

As feminist researchers, both locally and internationally, have argued, young women require an erotic education as much as they require an education on the dangers that sex can pose (Fine, 1988; Holland et al., 1990; Lesch & Kruger, 2004; Shefer & Foster, 2001; Thompson, 1990; Tolman, 1994; Vance, 1984, Wood & Foster, 1995). An erotic education could potentially enable them to explore their desires and to gain sexual agency. Fine (1988) points to the absence of a sex educational discourse which

names desire, pleasure, or sexual entitlement, particularly for females: when spoken, it is always “tagged with a reminder of ‘consequences’ – emotional, physical, moral, reproductive, and/or financial” (p. 33). The “constriction of what is called sexuality allows girls one primary decision – to say yes or no – to a question not necessarily their own. A discourse of desire in which young women have a choice would be informed and generated out of their own socially constructed meanings” (Fine, 1988, p. 34). This author suggests that:

A genuine discourse of desire would invite adolescents to explore what feels good and bad, desirable and undesirable, grounded in experiences, needs, and limits. Such a discourse would release young females from a position of receptivity, enable an analysis of the dialectics of victimisation and pleasure, and would pose female adolescents as subjects of sexuality, initiators as well as negotiators. (Fine, 1988, p. 33)

When young women are asked what is ‘missing’ from their sexual education, the ‘erotic’ is clearly identified:

Extract 21

- LK: What sorts of questions do girls have about sex that aren’t being answered, or are difficult to find answers about?
- Natalie: Like, how does it *feel*, and is it painful and that ... I’m forever asking that question, how it is, is it sore?
- Nerissa: And, like, how must I lay? Like, my one leg here? Or together? [Laughter] Must I do things? Must I make sounds? Lead him on?
- Chantelle: And do you bleed the first time?
- Nerissa: And if you don’t bleed, will the boyfriend think you not a virgin or something? Or whatever?
- Geraldine: I’m worried about that ... that’s why I’m worried ...
- Karen: Because it’s a different experience for everybody. I mean, if the foreplay is right, then obviously it’s not going to be as sore as when the foreplay is not ... It can be good ... I mean, because that is actually part of the sexual experience ... And you’re kind of scared to go out and ask questions – all these funny words, like *foreplay* ...
- Geraldine: But what about the orgasm – can, can, if you didn’t have sex, can you have an orgasm? If you maybe watching a movie –
- Natalie: Can a girl masturbate herself and orgasm?

[Focus Group, OV]

One of the focus group discussions was so animated and engaging that the participants asked if another group discussion could be set up. While the original research design had set up a single focus group to precede the individual interviews, I adjusted this in line with the participants' request. During the second focus group discussion with this group of young women, one of the participants brought along a book entitled 'The Magic of Sex' to share with the others. The book was received with much amusement, but also genuine interest. This young woman related to the group that the "best way" of finding out what sex is "really like" is to watch the late-night pornography that screens regularly on a local television channel – which she watches when she is sure that her mother is asleep.

Extract 22

I watch it, but I always keep a cushion on my lap ... I feel, I feel – aroused, not like, I'm not really aroused, but just that feeling, hot flushes... and things... and then I don't want to go away from the TV; I just want to watch the whole time. [Nerissa, OV]

Notwithstanding the irony that this young woman's only access to a sexual erotic is through pornographic shows, her open disclosure of her experiences of sexuality and arousal appeared to provide a context wherein the sexual erotic could be spoken about openly. The other participants in this group expressed open admiration for this young woman, who was "not shy" about revealing her sexuality to others. The surprise that the other participants evidenced in relation to a young woman who is able to name her desires confirms young women's contention that admissions of sexual pleasure are relatively silent amongst female peers. However, the naming of desire in this context created a space for the other young women to raise questions and seek answers.

5. Beyond the bedroom: Gender, bodies and control in heterosexual ‘social’ relationships

Thus far, the analysis has explored the discursive construction of young women’s sexual subjectivities in the context of heterosexual *sexual* relationships. The analysis now turns to explore young women’s understandings of the workings of heterosexual social relationships more generally. The categories of ‘heterosexual sexual relationships’ and ‘heterosexual social relationships’ are not analytically distinct, however: the gendering of bodies and powers in heterosexual sexual and social relationships are intimately intertwined, and mutually reinforcing in terms of the gendered positions of ‘agent’ and ‘object’ offered to young men and women respectively.

Normalising male dominance and female subservience

Young women’s accounts of heterosexual relationships commonly centre on the idea that – in or out of sex - it is ‘normal’ for the male partner to exert control over the body of the female partner, including her activities, movements and social interactions.

Extract 1

How I see it is ... a relationship is like – the man is *supposed* to be telling the girl what to do; the boy’s telling the girl: ‘you can’t do this, you can’t do that, you can’t go here, you can’t go there’. But vice versa it doesn’t work like that: if you must now tell your boyfriend ‘you can’t go to the movies or go hang out with your friends’ – they’re going to do it anyway, because they are more dominant; nobody tells them ... [Natalie, OV]

Here, male dominance and control in heterosexual relationships is construed as taken-for-granted, and even the way things ‘should’ be: “the man is *supposed* to be telling the girl what to do” [Extract 1]. Not only is this scenario implicitly posited as socially accepted and expected, but ‘natural’: the scenario cannot be reversed, as males “are more dominant”. Reference to the ‘imperative’ of male dominance and female subordination in heterosexual relationships takes some interesting twists, as in this extract:

Extract 2

Guys are *very* insecure. That's why they're so protective and – you can't go there; you can't do this – stuff like that; that's why they become so possessive in relationships ... The way I look at it, it's like a boost to their ego, because to see someone else vulnerable to them is like: I am superior than that person.

Whereas we, as women, I suppose because our mothers have always depended on us, and made us aware of what the role of a woman is supposed to be ... you don't *need* to be sheltered or protected or made to feel superior ... I think it's because they know their daughters are capable of being responsible ... Women have this natural instinct to know whether they can handle a situation or not ... I suppose it's a *natural thing* that women can handle ... I suppose it's something that every girl is born with – that guys *lack*. [Karen, OV]

In this instance, a discursive chain of reasoning is employed that positions women as having a 'natural' power, "something that every girl is born with", that boys and men "lack" [Extract 2]. Paradoxically, however, it is a woman's "role" (that is taught and instilled by mothers) to hide this power, or use this power to "boost" the fragile egos of 'naturally' vulnerable men. This is what Janeway (as cited in Holland et al., 1992, p. 651) refers to as the myth of female power: "her submission makes him a man". Within this chain of reasoning, "any exercise of women's power is not only unfeminine, but also threatening to men" (Holland et al., 1992, p. 651). The form of femininity that is advocated in this regard – one that is defined around compliance with subordination, and oriented towards accommodating the interests and desires of men – has been termed "emphasized femininity" (Connell, 1987, p. 187). Many of the participants appeared to 'perform' this form of femininity in their heterosexual relationships.

Extract 3

If you have a boyfriend ... he always wants to tell you what to do, but it's not the other way around ... When Damien and I were together ... I did feel a bit *controlled*, because it was forever what *he* wanted; it was never what *I* wanted ... But you didn't want to hurt his feelings ... so you gonna listen to him ... [Nerissa, OV]

Extract 4

I have high standards ... but I'm also one of those people like, I'll take less than what I could have; I'm that sort of person. Or, I will go out with someone because I feel sorry for them. Which is a *really* bad thing ... I'm just like one of those people where I *love* giving people

things ... I am like that ... I went out with this one guy ... and the *whole time* I just wanted to give him stuff emotionally ... But I *knew* subconsciously that he wasn't capable of giving me what I needed, you know ... So I just kept giving more than my share ... I *hate* letting people down ... [Helen, FH]

Extract 5

I've always had my standards, but ... I don't convey them that much ... Sometimes I'm too scared ... With Peter, I could actually honestly say I let him walk all over me. I wasn't aware of this at first, but then I did become aware of it. But then I loved him so much, and believed him, that he loved me, and I was so fearful of losing him ... I was aware that I was dropping my standards; really, I was. And – but then I kept judging myself and going like, what are you being? Come on! Really ... la, la, la. That type of the whole undermining – no, no, it's all ok; it's fine; it's fine. [Laura, FH]

Here, little direct male force appears to be necessary to make these young women enact a subservient role in the relationship, in which their needs and desires are subordinated to those of their partners: as these young women are under self-surveillance. The self-surveying quality of young women's sexual subjectivity is powerfully evident in Nerissa's use of the second-person: "you didn't want to hurt his feelings ... so you gonna listen to him" [Extract 3]. As extract 4 suggests, a young woman may be conscious and even critical of her 'tendency' to prioritise a partner's needs over own (and conscious that a partner will not necessarily relate in a reciprocal manner) – but her sense of self may be so deeply embedded in this form of feminine identity ("I am just one of those people where I *love* giving people things") that she may not have access to an alternative way of relating, or may feel unable to bear the consequences of discarding this identity (such as another person's disappointment). Alternatively, a young woman's fear that asserting and imposing her own standards and needs will jeopardise a relationship, or result in a withdrawal of a partner's love, produces her as a subject who complies with male privilege [Extract 5].

'Love', gender and power: Romanticising male dominance and female subordination

Discourses of 'love' play a powerful role in shaping the manner whereby young women make sense of gender power imbalances in heterosexual relationships. 'Love'

features powerfully within young women's explanatory accounts of gender power imbalances in heterosexual relationships, and is often employed to explain female self-sacrifice within heterosexual relationships:

Extract 6

My friend's boyfriend keeps telling her ... she must just stay at home. Then, when he comes at home, and says, 'let's go!', she must always be available. Actually, she's stopped doing everything ... and every time she's at home, waiting for her boyfriend ... I think she loves him *too much*. More than she loves herself. But, for me, it's like, I don't care; I wouldn't let anyone control me the way she is being controlled. [Dudu, MP]

Here, a young woman attributes her friend's submission to her boyfriend's demands to the fact that "she loves him *too much*. More than she loves herself" [Extract 6]. While this young woman asserts, in forthright terms, that *she* would not let anyone control her in the way that her friend is being controlled, young woman's accounts suggest that even those who are conscious, and highly critical, of the power of masculine privilege in heterosexual social relationships, fear losing control in the face of love. Karen's extended narrative, presented below [Extract 7], suggests some of the discursive complexities and fractures at play in young women's sexual subjectivities, which militate against their asserting agency in heterosexual social relationships in a straightforward manner:

Extract 7

I was saying the other day, what is it about me that I haven't gone out, gotten a boyfriend? What's wrong? ... Sometimes when I see people walking down the road, hand in hand, then I'm like, god how I wish I was them! My cousins and friends ... they all have boyfriends, and all of them have sex lives ...

But I'm so glad that I'm the odd one out: they're forever having to answer to their boyfriend, which I don't want – because I have to answer to my parents already; why do I need to answer to someone else? I don't need that in my life ... Because *he's* not my mother, and he's not my father – he's only the boyfriend. He doesn't *own* me ... I don't want him to tell me what to do! I have my parents to do that – why would I want someone else?

When you're in a relationship, it's as though you forever have this baggage with you: like, wherever you go, he had to go; wherever he goes, you have to go, sort of thing, so ... That's what scares me; there's no independence: because you're always trying to please your

partner or something. You don't wanna say something, because you're scared you're going to offend that person ... And I'm like, no, that doesn't sound like me ...

And that's what scares me the most: because, will I become like that when I'm in a relationship one day? I don't want to become like that! ... I'm scared that someone else might inspire me to want to have relationship right now, and I might do something stupid then, because love can blind people, believe you me, it *can*! And – I'm just scared that I won't be able to think as clearly as what I'm thinking now – being outside of a relationship, and knowing what I want. Because then, I'm scared of putting my values and my beliefs aside for someone else ... [Karen, OV]

What is striking in this young woman's account is the ambivalence she feels in relation to heterosexual relationships. On the one hand, she feels like "the odd one out" amongst her peers who "all" have boyfriends and "sex lives", and questions "what's wrong" with her. On the other hand, based on evidence from her peers' relationships, she is also "glad" to be the odd one out: as she doesn't want to have to "answer to" a boyfriend. Her ambivalence extends into her ideas about the workings of gender and power in heterosexual relationships: on the one hand, she asserts that a boyfriend should not have the right to "own" her; but on other hand, she fears that the loss of independence that a heterosexual relationship will bring will stem from her own investment in meeting a partner's needs and protecting his feelings. This young woman fears that her present, clear-thinking position "outside of a relationship" – wherein she knows what she wants, values and believes – cannot be upheld within the confines of a heterosexual relationship: "because love can blind you, *believe you me, it can!*".

As evidenced above, young women's position of subservience and subordination within heterosexual relationships is construed as a function of their loving a partner "too much" [Extract 6] or being "blinded by love" [Extract 7]. On the other end of the spectrum, young women also interpret male control and dominance, even those that take violent forms, as an expression of a male partner's 'love', and a reflection of his emotional investment in the relationship.

Extract 8

My friend ... she's been abused by her boyfriend. And she actually says, if someone hits you, it's the way that he shows you that he loves

you. And I'm like, 'No! They're making you their punch bag or something. Someone that loves you can't hit you; make you feel pain or something ... If you beat me up, you don't love me; you're just abusing me, you're making me your punch bag'. But when I've tried to talk with my friends about that, they're like, 'No, Thando, you don't actually understand: *you're still young* ... If a person beats you, it's the way that he shows you he loves you ... It's the way that he tries to show that he cares. Actually, if he lets you do whatever you want to do, he doesn't care' ... And I'm like, 'no, it's bad; it's wrong. Even, there's a law that says it's wrong for a man to hit a woman'. But I think they're in denial; they know it's wrong but they think they love this person ... It's very bad, because sometimes she has bruises ... [Dudu, MP]

As the extract above suggests, young women may subscribe to the idea that male control, dominance and physical abuse is an expression of a partners' love, rather than interpreting this as abuse. Such findings reflect those of other studies conducted in South Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa more broadly (Barker & Ricardo, 2005; Wood & Jewkes, 2001; Wood et al., 1998). A frightening corollary of this notion is contained within the view that an *absence* of coercion and violence is a sign that a partner does *not* care about or love his girlfriend. In a New Zealand study, Jackson (2001) finds that young women may discuss their experiences of abuse through the lens of love or romance – thus avoiding labelling a partner as abusive, or denying that their experiences were abusive - as a strategic means of resisting the victim status attached to being abused. Jackson's study points to the complexity of female 'victimhood' and empowerment: while the denial of victim status may be empowering for women, it may also keep their abuse invisible, and thus be complicit in sustaining male-on-female violence.

The equation of violence and pain with romantic love was challenged vehemently by many of the participants. As the extract above suggests, there is active debate and contestation at play in young women's conversations. Dudu's appeal to legislation that "says that it is wrong for a man to hit a woman" [Extract 8] suggests that some young women are taking up new discourses of gender rights and equality that are reflective of the post-apartheid South African Bill of Rights (see Posel, 2004). This Bill is an extension of the new Constitution of 1996, which fundamentally subverts traditional ideas of sex as a 'private' matter, which has contributed to the 'normalisation' of sex in public conversation and political debate. As Posel (2004)

recognises, while the allocation of sexual rights does not in and of itself resolve the problems of sexual violence and abuse, this does open space for contestation of traditional power imbalances and for consciousness change.

The economics of 'love': The material context of male privilege and dominance

Some of the material specificities of the South African context emerged in discussions with participants living in the poorer areas of the research site, wherein many young women rely upon their boyfriends to provide them with material goods. In such instances, as Xoliswa [MP] explained, a girl may not be "in love with her boyfriend" but, rather, "in love with his money". This type of 'love' appears to compound the complexities surrounding consent/non-consent to sex [Extract 9], and reinforce the male appropriation of sexual desire and pleasure [Extract 10]:

Extract 9

If he says that he wants to sleep with you, you won't be able to say, no, I can't. Because you will think about the things that he bought you, the things that he's given to you. It would be like, ok, let me do it.
[Xoliswa, MP]

Extract 10

LK: What do girls typically want from a relationship?
Geraldine: Just basically someone who's there; that will take them out; that will buy them whatever they want.
Karen: And they certainly want something in return!
Natalie: Oh, ja!
LK: Do boys and girls get something different out of being in a relationship together?
Nerissa: Yes –
Geraldine: Like if they having sex, the guy gets pleasure out of having sex with the girl, and if the guy can provide for the girl, then she feels that all her needs are met ...
[Focus Group, OV]

Female material dependency upon partners appears to be underscored by the fact that many young women see their schooling and work as a way of passing the time until they find a husband who will support them financially. Young women are conscious

that this can have disempowering consequences, and some actively challenge these norms:

Extract 11

I decided that I don't want a boyfriend ... when I realised that I want to ... do something constructive with my life, and that I just don't want to be another nobody ... And I feel like if I were to get into a relationship now, it will distract me, and then I would be like off the road of where I want to be ...

I mean, I look at the community, and I look at some of the ladies, people in my class, and I think: they've got so much potential to be great things ... I've noticed that they've had *goals* and dreams, and now that they're in a relationship, as long as they're getting the money in ... they're just fine with being whatever: now they just think, no, but I'm going to get married in two years, so ... I can't really go do that or that or that ... Nowadays, lots of people just get married, and then they forget about what *they* really wanted to do with their lives: they're the housewife, and the mother, and they're not really the person they wanted to be; they're just *someone's wife* ... It's like you lose your own identity ... you worry more about everything around you more than you worry about yourself ... They feel like, because they're in the marriage now, they have to worry about more important things than themselves, and therefore they neglect themselves. And after a time, you become unhappy, and then you feel trapped in your relationship and you're unhappy ... I think that people put their husbands before themselves ... and the woman ends up sacrificing herself.

I suppose it is about independence: I want to be my own person *before* I get married; I want to have my own success *before* I get married ... [Faiza, OV]

This young woman [Extract 11] presents a view on heterosexual attachments that figures these as having a constraining function upon a young woman's ability to "do something constructive" with her life. She actively challenges the idea that young women should define themselves in relation to their male partners – and is adamant that she will not end up becoming "just *someone's wife*". At many points, the participants drew on stereotypical constructions of traditional gender roles, with women's role centred upon her husband and children, and men's role as centred on breadwinning. The traditional dynamic of male provision, and female relegation to the domestic sphere, was often constructed as founding the basis of male control and female subordination within married relationships.

Extract 12

What I see in our community, if the wife don't work, if she's unemployed and she's at home, and then the husband works ... then they [men] feel that they have this *right* that they can control the lady because she's at home: I bring in the money, so I will control. I think that it's the money ... I don't want my husband to work for me; I also want to work, so I can be independent. And then maybe, if he decides to leave me, then I can say that I'm independent, I can take care of myself and my children and whatever. [Nerissa, OV]

However, some young women's accounts (with reference to mothers and other adult women in their communities) suggest that women are, indeed, earning salaries, and often taking up the role of primary breadwinner in families. Boonzaier (2005) observes that, while the changing gender climate in South Africa allows for more women to earn salaries that are on a par with those of men, South Africa's status as a developing country means that many people struggle with extreme poverty and unemployment. In such circumstances, women may be primary breadwinners, while their male partners struggle with chronic unemployment. Nonetheless, the participants' accounts suggest that this reversal of gender roles has not signified a simple reversal of gendered power. In some instances, their accounts suggest that female material power can contribute towards, rather than allay, existing patterns of male domination. One young woman [Extract 13] explained that her neighbour, a qualified school-teacher (a respected position in this community), suffered emotional and physical abuse from her unemployed husband as a consequence:

Extract 13

She was the only one working; she was the only one bringing in money ... she had all the power in the relationship, because of her job, her degrees and everything. And he was like *nothing compared to her* – and I suppose that was what he felt threatened by. And sometimes he would say that 'nobody else will take you when I'm done with you' ... [Karen, OV]

Boonzaier (2005; 2006) finds that men's notions of successful masculinity are clearly linked to their ability to become or remain economic providers for the family. However, as a result of the changing economic climate, many men are finding it difficult to assume these roles, resulting in experiences of powerlessness and a crisis in their gendered subjectivity. This researcher found that, problematically, women often perceived their earning power as a source of relationship conflict, and that men

justified their violent behaviour by appeal to their experiences of powerlessness. The problematic nature of this form of justification for male behaviour (on the part of both women and men) is evident in the manner whereby some of the participants upheld the idea that their own economic empowerment would be threatening to a male partner, and stand as an invitation to be abused:

Extract 14

I always said that I want the guy to earn more than me, because I don't want it to become a *problem* in the relationship. Because my father earned less than my mother ... And he used to say, 'it's because *you* can pay for everything and *I* can't; that's why you think I'm less than a man!'. So I think the guy feels inferior ... And I think that it does cause *strain* in the relationship, and abuse ... Men find it *degrading* to be at home while his wife is working. [Geraldine, OV]

To conclude part six, it appears that young women's experiences of sexuality are discursively constituted within a context that encourages them to "attach themselves to young men in order to succeed as conventionally feminine women, but they are then inhibited from seeing this desired and expected relationship as a structurally unequal one" (Holland et al., 1990, p. 340). Discourses of femininity and romance, which play a powerful role in constituting sex as a relinquishment of control in the face of love (Holland et al., 1996; Thomson & Holland, 1998), extend into the broader workings of power in heterosexual relationships: wherein being 'in love' signals giving up personal control, standards, values and dreams. As this material suggests, discourses of femininity and romance not only place constraints upon young women's ability to uphold individual goals, values and standards in heterosexual social relationships, but also compromise their ability to protect themselves from physical harm. The "love game", in this regard, has a dark underbelly.

6. Explanatory discourses on sexual risk-taking: 'Bad girls/at risk' categories

Part six explores and interrogates young women's explanatory accounts on sexual 'risk' (for pregnancy and HIV/AIDS) and 'risk-taking' amongst adolescent girls. Explanatory discourses on sexual risk/risk-taking include: (1) Motherhood as a pathway to adulthood; (2) Heterosexual power imbalances; (3) Deficient parenting / disorganised households; (4) Deviant communities and cultures; and (5) Moral decay. While these discourses link sexual risk and risk-taking with a multitude of factors and processes, operating on individual, inter-personal and societal levels, the common motif that filters through and connects these discourses is the notion that young women 'wilfully' make 'bad' choices that lead to 'bad' outcomes.

Motherhood as a pathway to adulthood²

A popular explanatory discourse for teenage pregnancy embodies the notion that an adolescent girl may deliberately choose to fall pregnant as a way of achieving a more 'adult' status than her age dictates. Such ideas are reflective of other South African research findings (e.g. Preston-Whyte & Allen, 1992; Preston-Whyte & Zondi, 1991, 1992; Varga & Makubalo, 1996) which highlight the fact that young African women sometimes consciously wish to conceive a child as a way of proving fertility, with child-bearing construed as an essential part of being a woman and achieving success as a woman. Empirical studies (Preston-Whyte & Allen, 1992; Preston-Whyte & Zondi, 1991, 1992; Salo, 2004) have found that, in the context of limited material resources, childbirth can confer on a girl the valued status of motherhood; can be construed as a way of obtaining a more senior status than one of dependent child; and can represent a pathway to adulthood in cases where marriage is delayed by a lack of money, suitable accommodation or the necessity of amassing bride wealth. However, other studies suggest that, particularly in urban contexts, education is prioritised over child-bearing, and most young women do not wish to have children too early (Kaufman, de Wet & Stadler, 2000; LeClerc-Madlala, 2002; MacPhail & Campbell, 2001). Similarly, a national survey of South African youth reports that 66 percent of

² See Macleod's (2001) analysis of academic discourse concerning teenage pregnancy in the South African literature

girls who had been pregnant stated in a survey questionnaire that they had not wanted to be (Pettifor et al., 2004).

Regardless of whether it 'really' is the case that adolescent girls may choose to fall pregnant or not, the 'motherhood as a pathway to adulthood' discourse, as reflected within the participants' talk, generally framed decision-making along such lines in negative, deviant terms:

Extract 1

Most of them want to be grown-ups before their time. Because they don't want to be told what to do, and they don't want to do this, and they don't want to do that. And so they like, when you're pregnant or have a child, it's like, you like *older* than what you really are - but you *not*. Because you think you've got a child, you're not a child anymore. But then they still depend on their parents or whatever to buy little baby clothes, or to stand by them. But I so disagree for that; it's like: *you* had a child, now it's like, well my mommy's taking care of my child. And then they come back to school ... and it's as if they get an opportunity to do it all over again ... Ja, they want to do things that adults do, and not be like all childish, and go to school, and be good. But then, when the consequences of their actions come, they don't want to face that; the responsibility that comes with the *adult* things.
[Natalie, OV]

Here, adolescent girls choose to fall pregnant because they "want to be grown ups *before their time*" [Extract 1]. Significantly, any adult status that may be conferred through child-bearing is seen as accrued illegitimately, and towards the deviant ends of sidestepping what an adolescent girl 'should be doing': listening to adults, going to school, and being "good". Furthermore, the adolescent girl does not "want" to face the "consequences of their actions" and take up "the responsibility that comes with adult things". Here, the teenage mother is construed as 'wilfully irresponsible': she could potentially redeem herself by taking up the 'adult' responsibilities that accompany motherhood, but she chooses not to.

In other instances, teenage mothers are construed as incapable of 'good mothering', and incapable of comfortably occupying the 'adult' status that motherhood confers, regardless of their intentions:

Extract 2

It's just it's like *so sad* because – she's like *only fifteen*; she's only fifteen ... She's a baby herself and she's having a baby, you know?
[Kate, FH]

Extract 3

She was careless with the child, and now that she has it, she doesn't look after it properly. It's just, she has that childishness inside her ...
[Xoliswa, MP]

Extract 4

They have a child out of marriage ... and they don't think about that little one that has to come into the world; facing the world. And they have to ... be *motherly enough* to take responsibilities and – *stuff like that, man*. [Chantelle, OV]

Here, pregnant teenagers are construed as incapable of occupying an adult status (“She’s a baby herself and she’s having a baby” [Extract 2]) and teenage mothers are represented as incapable of being “motherly enough” because of their status as children themselves (“she has that childishness inside her” [Extract 3]) or by virtue of their unwed status (“they have a child out of marriage ...” [Extract 4]).

The reference to ‘babies having babies’ resonates with popular and academic constructions of teenage pregnancy: “Children having children” (Boult cited in Macleod, 2006, p. 125) is one of the ways in which teenage pregnancy has been described in South Africa and elsewhere. As Macleod (2006) contends, when an adolescent girl falls pregnant, “she subverts the assumed transitional nature of adolescence, engaging in adult practices (sexual activity, reproduction) at a time of life when the dominant social reading is ‘not-yet-adult’” (p. 134). When a teenage girl becomes pregnant, she “pollutes the category of child and becomes a deviant adult” (Lawson cited in Macleod, 2006, p. 134). The metaphor of pollution carried through a number of the participants’ accounts. For example, in the following account of how pregnant teenagers are received within the church, pregnant teenagers are said to be required to take up an adult position within social institutions, and considered a “bad” and potentially contagious “example” to other young women:

Extract 5

You don't get confirmed ... as a *child* ... you get confirmed as an adult. But you first have to go to *confession* and *repent* and stuff like that ... Even though it's not going to take away the fact that you have a child. You not treated as a child anymore, you have to do the things that grown-ups do in the church ... It's not that you can't interact with the youth – because we *could* learn from your experience; but they'd have to take it as it's a bad example, ok? [Karen, OV]

Heterosexual power imbalances

Heterosexual power imbalances also feature powerfully within explanatory discourses on sexual risk-taking (and are discussed in greater nuance and depth in part seven). However, when heterosexual power dynamics enter into explanatory discourse, these are often reduced to the level of conscious decision-making, as in this extract:

Extract 6

Sometimes the girls would like ask the guy, 'should I go on the pill?' or 'is it ok with you?' And he'd like say 'no' or 'yes'; stuff like that ... In other relationships, the girls are more dominant. If she says, I'm gonna go on the pill, regardless of what he says, then she will do it. But in most relationships the girls are more: '*please help me I can't make up my own mind...*' [Affects a high pitched voice]. And the guys like sort of see that – that you are vulnerable to – being persuaded ... *Other girls* – like a girl in my class - ... the first relationship that she was in actually moulded her point of view on the relationships that you *should* have further on. So – she probably said to herself, 'I like it when a guy's dominant ... I want my guy to be dominant, more dominant than me'. It's a personal decision that the girl had to make ... [Geraldine, OV]

Here, male privilege in decision-making around contraception is construed as a "personal decision" [Extract 6] on the part of a young woman: who alternatively 'chooses' to allow her partner to dominate such decisions or, alternatively, 'chooses' to be dominant herself. In this scenario, the young woman is presented as ultimately in control of whether contraception is used or not: and if she 'allows' her partner to dominate decision-making, she is accountable for whatever consequences befall her.

Another common feature of explanatory discourses on unsafe sexual practices centred upon the idea that falling pregnant is part of a conscious, deliberate strategy whereby a young woman manipulates power imbalances operating within a heterosexual

relationship. Here, a young woman mobilises her reproductive capacity as a means of 'keeping' a boyfriend, 'getting revenge' on a boyfriend who has 'dumped' her, or as a means of 'changing' an abusive and/or unfaithful boyfriend:

Extract 7

- Natalie: Sometimes they do it to keep their boyfriends – they need to have babies to keep them together ...
- Nerissa: And sometimes, like, to get revenge at your boyfriend for maybe dumping you or something. He has to stay ...
- Karen: What they don't realise is that it's easy for the guy to walk away and start a new family. And then you stuck with that child forever ...
- Nerissa: You often see the women left with the baby ...
- Karen: The one girl, when she told me that she was pregnant, I asked her why; she said her boyfriend abused her; he was cheating on her ... and she thought that if I fell pregnant then he would change; *the stupidest thing I ever heard!* Because he's *never* going to change: because if he was beating on you then, who's gonna say he's not gonna beat on you now? And if he was cheating on you then, who's gonna say he's not gonna cheat on you now? And I mean if you pregnant ... and you blowing up and everything, and there's a sexy girl here, I mean ... who's he gonna choose?

[Focus Group, OV]

Again, decision-making around the use and non-use of contraception is represented in terms of conscious, autonomous decision-making upon the part of young women. Furthermore, a young woman's decision-making is construed as deficient, and this strategy ultimately self-defeating: as "it's easy for the guy to walk away" [Extract 7]. The cultural climate that makes it so easy for young men to simply "walk away" (and continue to engage in abusive practices and infidelity) is not placed under interrogation – rendering the young woman accountable for not 'knowing better'. Furthermore, any problems experienced by the children of teenage mothers become attributed to bad personal choices on the part of these young women, rather than being attributed to inadequate fathering (and a society that renders this the case):

Extract 8

And if you see the amount of children being born – you wonder, where are the fathers? And they're [teenage mothers] like, 'no, he's not in my life anymore' ... So *why* do you have to punish your *child*? For *your*

mistake ... you're punishing your child actually by not giving the child a fatherly figure or a role model to look up to. And then you get those *women* that, they're still with their boyfriends, and the child sees this father, he's *abusing* the mother, and then they think: oh, that's what's supposed to be ... [Karen, OV]

In this instance, the teenage mother is blamed if the father of the child is *absent*, and held accountable for his absence ("you're punishing the child ... by not giving him a fatherly role") while, on the other hand, she is also blameworthy if the father is *present*, and not serving as a 'positive' role model for his child (a young women is blamed for staying in an abusive relationship with the father of the child) [Extract 8].

Deficient parenting / disorganised households

By far the most popular explanatory discourse on teenage pregnancy and HIV/AIDS figures these as outcomes of 'deficient' parenting (including substance abuse, and emotionally- absent or withholding mothers or fathers) and 'disorganised' households ("broken homes", characterised by marital break-down, divorce and absent mothers, and absent fathers in particular). Young women growing up in such family/household contexts are categorised as likely to be 'active risk-takers' or, alternatively, 'passively at-risk'.

Active risk-takers

In the first categorisation ('active risk-takers'), sexual promiscuity and 'risk-taking' are construed as an outlet for psychological frustration, with young women harnessing their reproductive capacity as a 'weapon' against parents who are perceived to have failed them (Extract 10; 11), or as a tool for mobilising absent, yet much-desired parental attention (Extract 9):

Extract 9

I think it's either something that the mommy or the daddy did ... Say like for instance ... the mommy is forever drinking and never caring, and you don't feel that mother's love that the mommy's supposed to give. So ... they're doing this thinking: maybe she will take notice of me now that I'm maybe pregnant ... [Natalie, OV]

Extract 10

- Nerissa: And I sometimes think it is maybe out of spitefulness; just to spite your parents ...
- Natalie: Sometimes it's just to get back at their parents!
- Geraldine: The parents might have split up from divorce or whatever. Then, because the child feels that she is the product of that divorce, is the cause of it, then to get back at the parents for splitting up, they, like go and make a baby ...
- Natalie: It's kind of stupid, because you end up hurting yourself in any case ...

[Focus Group, OV]

Extract 11

Some girls ... some of them are pretty beautiful and everything. But they take that to their advantage and they use guys; they use guys for their own ways, and sleep with them and once they get tired of them, they throw them away like a piece of toilet paper. I think what happens is, they lack love at home ... So now they're taking it out on society, and turning into these *things* walking around on the streets ... one of those *oestrogen bombs*.

Like Anita ... she's been all around the block: she slept with about twenty, thirty different guys last year. And she used to do ... all of these horrible drugs ... I don't want to end up like that. She does have issues at home: I mean, she's constantly fighting with her mother ... [And] she doesn't have a father, so I think she's taking out her frustration about her father out on other guys by sleeping with them. She sleeps with them, and then the next day, she gives them the cold shoulder I think it's the whole thing at home; the whole family issue ... it all points to the home. But she could be such a nice girl; she could be so nice. But she has to spoil it by doing all these things...She's hurting herself and she doesn't know it ... It's probably just a psychological thing. I mean, I get a lot of love from home, so I don't need to go out and seek love ... [Sally, FH]

In extract 11, female sexuality is constructed as dangerous – potentially explosive when inadequately displaced or substituted for by familial love – both for males, the objects of this unbridled sexuality, and even for “society”. This reflects traditional constructions of female sexuality which figure this as ‘dangerous’ and unbridled when not expressed within the confines of married heterosexuality (Hollway, 1984). While the participants uphold the notion that it is ‘natural’ for males to ‘use’ females in the realm of sexuality (see part two), girls who employ their powers of attraction to ‘use’ males do this because of social circumstances. Females only become slaves to biology – “oestrogen bombs” – because of ‘non-natural’ processes. Active female sexuality is

so unnatural when situated in relation to femininity that sexually promiscuous girls are seen as less-than-human “things”, reduced purely to a package of biology and hormones. Here, female sexual promiscuity is constructed in deviant terms, placed alongside the use of “horrible drugs”. There is a tension evident in the account, as Sally shifts between blaming her classmate, on the one hand – “she could be so nice ... but she has to spoil it by doing all these things” – and attributing her classmate’s behaviour to “the home” and its “psychological” outcomes.

The idea that young women who lack love at home “go out and seek love” [Extract 11] through multiple sexual partnerships was a popular one. In some instances, emotionally-deprived young women’s quest for love and acceptance through sexual partnering is construed as leading, in turn, to “careless” contraceptive practices, or the choice to abandon condoms in a quest to find greater intimacy, as in the following extract:

Extract 12

... she’s slept with more than ten guys; she’s still looking for more: *she’s looking for that key*. And she can’t find it ... I think that’s where it [HIV/AIDS] evolves; like, you get so careless after a while that, you’re so desperate to find that key type thing. And it’s like, well, maybe I should try it without a condom; maybe it’s gonna be different. And that’s how HIV and AIDS is created, and you get pregnant and stuff. [Jane, FH]

Here, HIV/AIDS becomes a symptom of emotional deprivation, and emotional deprivation the ‘origin’ of HIV/AIDS (“that’s where HIV/AIDS evolves”; “that’s how HIV and AIDS is created”).

Passively ‘at risk’ girls

In the second categorisation (‘passively at-risk’), young women are rendered ‘at risk’ or prone to pregnancy and HIV/AIDS as a result of a lack of will to take care of themselves and their bodies. This ‘lack of will’ or passivity is construed as an outcome of a lack of ‘self-worth’ and ‘self-respect’ which are, in turn, constructed as psychological by-products of “broken homes” and emotionally or physically absent parents.

Extract 15

Jane: It's also the areas you living in. It's a culture ... well, these girls, they stayed in Ocean View. And they're more mature for their age. They mature much quicker ... they're *forced* to grow up quicker. Like, your parents will tell you to take responsibilities and stuff ... Also, they used to hang out with gang members and stuff. So it's also really peer pressure: you know, you should have sex and whatever ... And they also used to smoke dagga and ... drink alcohol. So it's like drugs and alcohol combined ...

Lisa: What I find really scary, once on TV in America, and I heard once in South Africa, like Lavender Hill, and that, like those gangs, if a girl wants to get into a gang, she has to sleep with like every guy in the gang. Just to get in. It's like initiation or something.

[Focus Group, FH]

In South Africa, the interlinking references to 'areas' and cultural grouping have overt racial and class-related connotations: Ocean View and Lavender Hill are both poor, coloured neighbourhoods, which are commonly represented within the media in terms of the 'social problems' (including teenage pregnancy, gang violence, illegal drug-dealing and substance abuse) pervading these areas. Noteworthy is the fact that, in this instance, the focus group participants all represented a white, middle class demographic. In this extract, cultural practices of child-rearing, whereby girls are socialised into adult "responsibilities" at an early age are linked, in turn, with tendencies to engage in practices that society reads as 'adult' (i.e. sexual activity and child-bearing). Despite the stress upon "responsibilities", this idea is then tagged with a comment about the types of 'irresponsible' or 'risky' behaviours in which this demographic of girls commonly engages: under-age drinking and the consumption of illegal drugs. Here, female adolescent sexuality is framed as part of a generally 'disordered' pattern of consumption (including early sex, sexual promiscuity, alcohol and drugs) and anti-social behaviour (gang-involvement).

This type of categorisation was not only deployed by participants who represented less marginalised racial and class groupings. For example, amongst the African demographic of participants, there was a tendency to associate adolescent girls' sexual risk-taking with the relative 'permissiveness' of modern, urban parenting styles, compared with rural areas which still espouse a traditional culture which controls

adolescent sexuality. This demographic of participants often made reference to the idea that, in more traditionally-minded settings, a culture of respect for elders and more adult supervision plays a role in curbing adolescent sexuality. Conversely, in modernised, urban settings, such as the one in which these young women were residing, adolescent sexuality is construed as 'out of control':

Extract 16

Here, there are a lot of young girls who are going to the shebeens³ and going out at night, and nobody was controlling them. And pregnancy and everything can come out of that. [Thandi, MP]

In this explanatory discourse, as in discourses concerning parenting, cultural and community-level processes are figured as having a 'trickle-down' effect upon young women's sexual decision-making and practices.

Moral decay

Within the discourse of 'moral decay' (see Macleod's (2006) analysis of teenage pregnancy literature), teenage sexual activity, pregnancy and HIV/AIDS are constructed as the problematic outcomes of a relaxation in moral standards and a sexually-permissive society. This discourse is closely aligned with the 'discourse of (im)morality', which pervades adult-adolescent communication around sex (see part one).

Extract 17

I think TV is one of the major contributors to the corruption in society ... five year old, six year old people are watching Days of our Lives, and they showing people kissing and stuff like that that ... The point is, young children ... some of them are still unaware ... they see these things and they think it's fine then to do it ... I mean, they make [sex] seem so *cheap*, so, like, 'ok, I'll sleep with this one, and then I can sleep with that one'...

And I think for a young child, growing up, seeing what is happening now in society, seeing all these people pregnant, they assume or they think that, 'oh, that's the norm of everything'; or 'that's the way things should be'. So then they grow up with a sort of, you know, knowledge or whatever, that that is how people should react, or

³ Purveyors of alcohol (historically illegal and unregulated), common in South African townships

how people act. I think that's what people have lost; they don't feel that [sex is] sacred to them, or it's something important to them ... because ... they see all these other people do it, and they just think it's the norm, and they just do it as well.

I think it sort of starts with the growing up of parents, you know, the discipline ... When you're *not* disciplined, and ... when you don't have that sort of guidance to tell you: no, this is right and wrong, you just sort of go out and, you know, do as you please. [Faiza, OV]

Extract 18

I feel that that girls don't have self-respect here: they do things and they don't even think about them. They're like, 'no, whoever is doing it [sex] – so I'm doing it; so it's fine!'. If friends say it's fine, it's fine. Even if it's wrong, and you know that is wrong, you don't have that confidence to stand up for yourself and say, no, this is really wrong. I shouldn't do this. They're more like hiding; they're hiding their selves ... I think it's because they haven't been in workshops where you actually told to have confidence of yourself ... So I think they weren't actually *that* confident about their selves; that is why they don't care, or say 'no' ... [Dudu, MP]

Extract 19

I think girls are losing their sense of who *they* are, and what *they* want: 'my friends have had sex, so I can also go out and do that' ... Girls need the self-control and the *knowledge* of who they are and who they want to be one day ... And it's quite sad that parents don't speak to their children about [sex] ... They hear these things from their friends. And their friends are giving them the wrong information, and they want to go out and experiment ... But it's for *parents* to make their children aware that, ok, sex is good, right enough – but it's confined to *marriage*. And once parents bring *that* across, once they *practice* that, it would be easier for everybody else, and then there wouldn't be such a lot of babies being born; there wouldn't be such a lot of people dying from AIDS and stuff like that. Then we wouldn't *have* the problem of AIDS in the first place. [Karen, OV]

Within this discourse, young women (often referred to as 'children', rather than young adults) are construed as relatively passive recipients of external influences. Within this framework, young women are not represented as potentially desiring subjects of sex – they are construed as innocent, but easily corrupted by negative peer and societal influences, such as the media, and as unable to resist male sexual advances. Sexual activity is construed as something that young women engage in because they are inadequately equipped with values that allow them to distinguish between right and wrong. The forms of intervention proposed for curbing sexual permissiveness

entail targeting parents to “discipline” their children more strictly, and instil their young with Christian family values and teachings about the sanctity of sex and marriage (reflecting the hegemonic conceptualisation of the family as moral custodian of children’s sexuality (Foucault, 1978; Singer, as cited in Reddy, 2003)), and providing adolescent girls with assertiveness training that will give them the confidence to ‘say no’ to male sexual advances, and resist peer pressure.

References to ‘self-control’ and ‘self-respect’ feature powerfully within these accounts. As Fine (1988) observes, the language of self-control and self-respect is a reminder that sexual immorality breeds not only personal problems but social ones: if young women are instilled with moral teachings, “then there wouldn’t be such a lot of babies being born; there wouldn’t be such a lot of people dying of AIDS ... we wouldn’t have the problem of AIDS in the first place” [Extract 19]. Here, unwanted pregnancies and AIDS are firmly situated as problems caused by sexual ‘immorality’, and married heterosexuality is explicitly privileged over other forms of sexuality (Fine, 1988). Furthermore, there is an implicit assumption that sexual health and safety are guaranteed and promoted within marriage.

Deconstructing the ‘girls at risk’ discourse

While explanatory discourses on ‘risky’ sexual practices amongst adolescent girls are widely varied in content, there are a number of common conceptual elements in operation that suggest a coherent discursive chain of reasoning in operation.

One common factor underpinning many of these ideas is that the adolescent girl, in the face of a range of ‘good’ choices available to her, makes a ‘bad’ personal choice – “spoiling” her life chances, and setting into motion a cycle of individual failure and problems. This is particular salient in discourses relating to pregnancy. While falling pregnant is sometimes constructed as an active means whereby teenage girls try to exercise power in relationship that are otherwise beyond their control, such strategies are simultaneously constructed as self-destructive and self-defeating: an attempt to become “older than what she really is” [Extract 1] does not grant her full adult status, and simultaneously separates her from her peers; an attempt to ‘get attention’ from

parents is flawed, as parents re-direct attention and resources to the new baby; an attempt to 'hold on' to a boyfriend whose eye is wandering is met with rejection, and denial of responsibility. As one young woman phrased it, "It's kind of stupid, because you end up hurting yourself in any case" [Extract 10]. And, not only is the pregnant teenager/teenage mother "hurting herself" but also society: teenage mothers perpetuate and reproduce the very circumstances in the lives of their children to which their reproductive choices stood as a reaction in the first instance: through their choices, these young women bring up their children in fatherless or dysfunctional family contexts, producing more children 'at risk' of following the same self-destructive path of their mothers. Through this chain of reasoning, pregnant teenagers/teenage mothers become both the *product* as well as the *cause* of social problems.

As Harris (2005) contends, the 'at-risk' discourse operates to produce pregnant teenagers/teenage mothers/HIV-infected young women in dual terms: they are imagined as both 'passive victims' of circumstances that are beyond their control – failing or abusive heterosexual relationships, broken homes and inadequate parents, and social/moral decay – *as well as* 'wilful risk-takers' who harness their sexual/reproductive power to their own (self-)destructive ends. Through the construction of pregnant teenagers/teenage mothers/HIV-infected individuals as wilful risk-takers, 'risk' becomes a matter of personal choice, thus personalising so-called failure, and exonerating society. Harris (2005, p. 30) states that:

It is this idea of wilfulness and agency that makes an attribution of self-selected failure straightforward. Young women are imagined as having a range of good choices before them, and therefore those who choose poorly have no one to blame than themselves. Their so-called failure seems not only inevitable, but freely chosen and therefore warranting little sympathy.

7. Beyond the ‘bad girls’ thesis: Being a ‘good girl’ may be hazardous for her health

In this part of the chapter, I interrogate the idea that young women are faced with a wide moral spectrum of choice, and that their reproductive (and sexual health outcomes) are a product of their making ‘bad’ personal choices, in the face of a wide range of possible ‘good’ ones. I make additional reference to material, presented in the preceding analytical chapters, which challenges this idea. When young women make decisions regarding reproduction and sexual health, this decision-making is conducted within a cultural climate that defines and limits, to a large extent, the ‘good’ decisions that they can make. Young women, I will argue, are situated within a stark moral dichotomy within which they make their decisions surrounding reproduction and sexual health: and their attempts to stay on the ‘good’ side of this dichotomy do not simultaneously support empowered and responsible decision-making surrounding ‘safe sex’.

Male privilege

As discussed earlier in this dissertation, the privileging of male sexual pleasure is a significant expression of power in heterosexual relationships. One expression of the privileging of male sexual pleasure is the definition of what ‘counts’ as sex. Amongst the young women participating in this study, sex was most commonly understood as vaginal penetration. When non-penetrative sexual practices were mentioned, these were generally construed as ‘foreplay’ – a precursor to sexual intercourse. While the participants rarely reported experiencing any sort of sexual pleasure from vaginal intercourse, this was nonetheless equated with ‘real’ or ‘normal’ sex. The privileging of male sexual pleasure places young women at a disadvantage in negotiating safer sex, both in the constraints this poses upon taking up non-penetrative sexual practices (which can sometimes be ‘safer’ than penetrative practices), and upon the introduction of condoms into sexual encounters.

Extract 1

I’d say that the girls want to use the condom, but the boys say *I want flesh-to-flesh; I can’t have plastic*, you see ... They say that it’s very

nice when you having sex without a condom. When you have sex with a condom it's very painful ... Ja. So they don't want to use a condom.
[Phumla, MP]

Male privilege in decision-making around contraception is also supported by the fact that young women are inducted into their sexuality lacking in practical knowledge about their bodies and reproduction. A number of young women spoke of being uninformed about the mechanics of reproduction and STI infection at the time of their first sexual encounters. As discussed earlier, parent figures often utilise the threats of pregnancy and AIDS to keep their daughters from sexual experimentation, but convey very little practical information on how a young woman may protect herself should she engage in sexual intercourse. In this scenario, decision-making around contraceptives falls, by default, upon the male partner. Zodwa [MP], for example, explained that her partner had used a condom during her first sexual encounter, but she had not known “why”. She said that, at a later point in time, her mother had spoken to her about contraception as she was “older now” and “needed to know about such things”. While this does not mean that first sex, in such a scenario, is necessarily unprotected, young women enter into sex conscious that there are consequences of sex, but not sure of whether they are taking adequate precautions. Phumla [MP], for example, said “I did use a condom, but I wasn't sure that – how does it work? Is it safe enough? I was like – *what if I'm pregnant?*”.

Male privilege is also evident in the timing and frequency of sexual intercourse. As discussed earlier (see part four, extract 18), young women tend to defer the initiation of sexual intercourse to the male partner, considering it “embarrassing” if they were to initiate sex when a partner was “not ready”. This leads to a situation wherein there is a relative lack of communication surrounding sexual matters – which includes open discussions about contraception - between partners. A young woman's ability to bring up the use of condoms is severely constrained within such a scenario: as this entails the ‘presumption’ that sex is on the cards, and opens up the possibility of rejection and embarrassment (Thomson & Holland, 1998).

Sexual passion and spontaneity

Linked with this is the notion that sex is a spontaneous expression of passion and love. Many young women voiced the opinion that unprotected sex is often a function of the fact that sex is unplanned and spontaneous:

Extract 2

- Nerissa: I think certain people say, 'oh! I'm just gonna go this far and then I'm gonna stop'. But that's where they make the mistake: because going *that* far means you're prepared to go all the way.
- LK: The guy will think that?
- Nerissa: No, the girl ...
- LK: So the girl goes too far?
- Natalie: Sometimes she can't help but go too far -
- Geraldine: - because in the moment, some people might just want it.
- Faiza: Ja, it is that ...
- Natalie: In the moment, mmm ...
- Nerissa: Like, in a certain moment, when you having a certain emotion, a feeling and everything ...
- Geraldine: Sometimes it's not all planned - sometimes it's heavy petting involved. And then it just sort of happens ...
- Karen: I know girls, they say, they couldn't help it; the *urge just came over them!*
- Natalie: It's *sommer* in the moment ...
- Chantelle: I don't know if it [sex] is an accident, but I think that sometimes accidents *do* happen; you feel like you now, *you're madly in love now* ... My friend told me that, whenever she's with this boy, it's almost like she lose her mind; she feels so *different* when she's *with* him, and they busy *kissing*, and stuff like that, it's just like - everything is ok. Ja, nothing matters. But when he's away from her, then she starts to think about it: ok, what did I do now?

[Focus Group, OV]

Thomson and Holland (1998) contend that the belief that sex should be spontaneous is particularly attractive to young women, as it removes the necessity for female agency and masks a lack of confidence in and knowledge of their bodies. Additionally, as this extract suggests, romance and passion can be used retrospectively as a way of rationalising sex, without admitting that sex was planned and intended. Feminist researchers argue that “‘rational’ safer sex messages (‘you know the risks, the choice

is yours') can be seen as antithetical to discourses of conventional femininity, romance and passion which construct sex as a relinquishment of control in the face of love" (Thomson & Holland, 1998, p. 67). The importance that young women attach to sexual spontaneity capitulates with the dominant ideology that male sexual desire is a natural force that cannot – and should not – be controlled.

Condoms, trust and romance

As other studies have found, non-use of condoms is associated with the expression or demonstration of trust, can come to stand as a euphemism for monogamy or love (e.g. Thomson & Holland, 1998; Wood & Foster, 1995). A young woman who tries to introduce condoms into a sexual encounter can be accused of not trusting a partner, as in this young woman's experience:

Extract 3

If you say to your boyfriend, you must use a condom, he will ask you that, don't you trust me? If you want to use a condom, then boys say, don't you trust me? [Phumla, MP]

Young women do take up strategic measures for dealing with the dilemma of 'trust versus safety', however:

Extract 4

Like, if he didn't want to use it ... he would ask me, *don't you trust me?* And all those things. And I would ask, why do you ask, don't I trust you? Do you trust me enough that you won't use a condom when you sleeping with me? Because maybe I've been sleeping around; you don't know how many boys I've had! ... And then he would probably end up using it. [Xoliswa, MP]

This young woman [Extract 4] deflects her partner's accusation that she does not trust him by asking him whether *he* can be sure that *she* is not "sleeping around". Despite the fact that this young woman successfully (although not necessarily always: "then he would probably end up using it") negotiates safer sex, the problematic nature of this strategy lies in the fact that the young woman has to re-figure the scenario in such a way that it appears that using condoms is a way of protecting *him*. This reinforces

traditional versions of femininity, organised around catering towards the well-being of men. Furthermore, it is unlikely that many young women are able to adopt such a strategy, given that admitting to promiscuity can lead to a spoiled reputation, and admitting to infidelity can sometimes have violent repercussions – as this study (see part two), and other South African studies (e.g. MacPhail & Campbell, 2001; Whitefield, 1999; Wood et al., 1998) have found.

In other instances, the romance discourse can place more subtle constraints upon a young woman's ability to introduce condoms into heterosexual sexual encounters. Discourses of romance can have a constraining function upon young women's capacity to exercise agency in heterosexual in general, and over condom use in particular. In some cases, the romance discourse – whereby 'love' legitimates ceding control, and engaging in sexual activity – can simultaneously legitimate (and even necessitate) unprotected sex. This is powerfully illustrated in the following narrative concerning a young woman's experience of first sex:

Extract 5

He was pushing for a long time, but I was like, no, no, no, no ... And I eventually gave in after about three months. But I mean, I'd known him three years before that ... I know that I really thought he was the right person, because I really cared ... I trusted and believed in him ... and I really loved him. And I thought he felt the same way. He was saying, I do want to be with you ... you'll never know just how much I love you. So, on that level I thought it was right. [Laura, FH]

This young woman frames her decision to engage in sexual activity within discourses of conventional heterosexual feminine sexuality and romance, whereby sex is construed in terms of a relinquishment of control in the face of love. She appeared to be at great pains to legitimise her engagement in sexual activity by appeal to mutual trust and love. Similarly, she attributed the non-use of condoms with this partner to the fact that she had known him for a long time, and loved and trusted him. Here, the justification for sex becomes, in turn, the justification for unprotected intercourse; in fact, not engaging in unprotected intercourse would serve to render her decision to engage in sexual activity illegitimate, and challenge her identity as a 'good girl looking for love'. As Gavey and McPhillips (1999) contend, discourses on heterosexual romance constitute the female partner as passive, with the implicit

promise of a man's love and protection in return. However, this implicit expectation of love and protection went unfulfilled in this young woman's experience when, at a later point in the relationship, she discovered that her partner had been cheating on her with her best friend:

Extract 6

I later found out that he was actually like with *Kate* at the same time. I was like shocked; because, I mean, she's not a *slag* or anything, but her reputation with men – she goes for like really icky guys. And I was just like *oh, my gosh!* I was like *freaked out; what?* Because I mean – you *don't lie* about something like that; it's not, it's just not – you don't do that; *really, you don't* ... I had to go for an AIDS test and all that stuff.
[Laura, FH]

What is significant here is the fact that this young woman's concerns for her sexual safety are less a product of her partner's infidelity per se, but the 'type' of woman he chose to be unfaithful with: one who this participant knows to have a "reputation" for sleeping with "really icky guys" [Extract 6]. It is suggested that, if her partner *had* to be unfaithful to her, he could at least have chosen a 'good'/'clean' woman (see also Waldby, Kippax & Crawford, 1993; Wood & Foster, 1995). The fact that this young woman went for an AIDS test suggests that she took seriously the bodily risk at which she was placed. Curiously, however, when reflecting upon the experience, the fact that she had tested free from infection did not feature:

Extract 7

I mean I still wish that he hadn't been the first person I've actually slept with, because it was such a mess. But I'm actually alright with it, because ... I mean, I know from my side that I was with him because I really loved him; I trusted him; and I believed in him. And that's what I was looking for in a relationship. Like, you know, I can't help if he ... It wasn't like *I* was just trying to get with someone for no reason. So: I'm fine. [Laura, FH]

Here, this young woman explains that "she is fine" [Extract 7] – not because she is free from disease, but because her 'conscience' is clear. Her words suggest that her partner's infidelity, and the consequent danger in which he placed her sexual health, is almost irrelevant - as long as *she* "wasn't ... just trying to get with someone for no

reason". Protecting her reputation and identity as a 'good girl looking for love' features more significantly than protecting her bodily integrity.

The complexities of sexual 'risk' and 'safety'

Discussions with young women suggest that negotiating sexual 'risk' and 'safety' is not solely or simply a matter of protection against pregnancy and disease: rather, young women are engaged in a complex and contradictory process of managing their experiences in terms of successful femininity (and contributing to a partner's successful performance of masculinity) which entails protecting their bodies and their reputations, as well as a partner's ego.

One participant recounted an experience wherein a group of her 'friends' had locked her inside a room with a young man and, in this young woman's words, tried to "force" her to have sex with him. Her friends enticed her into the room by with the promise that "*you won't regret it ... it will be nice*":

Extract 8

Well, what was actually convincing me was the fact that they'd said, *you won't regret it and everything ... it will be nice ...* That's what they said. And I just gave in and went inside ... [Geraldine, OV]

Inside the room, this young woman had a change of heart, however:

Extract 9

Just the night before, me and my mommy spoke about sex, and I asked, now can you get a virus if the condom breaks or something? So I'm glad we had that talk the night before, because I don't think it would have – I think I might have gone through with it if I didn't have that thought in my head still ... And I'm thinking: *what if I get AIDS?* What if I get *AIDS*? And – that's all that's on my mind... I could get AIDS; I could get AIDS! ... That's all, that's *all* I was thinking about. [Geraldine, OV]

Extract 10

And then I realised that, at the end of the day, *I* have to walk out of here by myself, or with somebody else attached to me. And ... I don't think I was ready for the responsibility to walk out here being labelled as a slut, or whatever people label you as ... [Geraldine, OV]

Her decision not to consent to sex is framed against a mother's warning about diseases that was "in her head still" from their talk the previous evening [Extract 9]. While this young woman insists that the thought that "I could get AIDS!" is "all" that she was thinking about [Extract 9], she follows by rationalising her decision not to have sex in terms of the threat that having sex could pose for her social integrity: "I don't think I was ready for the responsibility to walk out here being labelled as a slut" [Extract 10]. When asked how she had enacted this decision, this young woman explained:

Extract 11

- Geraldine: I actually, I actually told him a lie. I made up some excuse ... I said, no, I'm not gonna do it because I have my period. And I was *lying* – because I'd just had my periods like a week ago. And then I went out, and I said, no; I told everybody outside that I'm not going to do it, and I *don't want to* ...
- LK: Did you feel like you needed to make an excuse?
- Geraldine: I think *just for him*, I had to make an excuse, but for everybody else, I told them the truth. Because, I mean, like, you can't – in the eyes of a guy – you can't turn them *down*; you have to have a good reason to turn them down, and I think that was a good lie that I thought up in my mind ...
- LK: Why can't you turn them down?
- Geraldine: Because then you'd bruise their ego and you'd ... you'd hurt them in some way that you don't even realise. But in their eyes, you *can't say no*. Because guys are like that, I think.

[Geraldine, OV]

This account is illustrative of some of the competing pressures young women are under when negotiating sex. When young women weigh up the decision to have sex, they are involved in a complex process of protecting their bodies, their reputations, as well as their (potential) partners' ego. They are viewing themselves through the "eyes" of a partner (who cannot be turned down) [Extract 11] and simultaneously through the eyes of actual/imagined onlookers (who have the power to wield the 'weapon' of a negative reputation). The complexity of pressures is further compounded by the fact that the very figures exerting pressure (peers and partners) can potentially be those who later have the power to impose social censure. What is glaringly absent within this account is a sense of this young woman's own desires:

these are displaced by concerns with the implication her decision will have upon others, and their perceptions of her. These are sidelined within a discursive framing of her sexuality as an object of an active male sexuality, and the social gaze.

Parents, daughters and sexual safety

In many regards, decision-making surrounding contraception is not really presented to or perceived by young women as a 'choice' that is theirs to make. While gender dynamics play a role in this scenario, inter-generational dynamics are also clearly in operation. As discussed in part one of this chapter, mothers sometimes forcibly place their daughters on birth control which, in the extract presented [see part one, extract 17], is ostensibly a means of protecting a daughter should she be raped. Other studies suggest that this practice also abounds in situations where mothers feel unable to control their daughter's sexuality, and therefore arrange for their daughters to receive contraceptive injections from menarche (Wood et al., 1997). This practice has also been found to be a means whereby mothers avoid conflict with their daughters regarding their sexuality (Kelly & Parker, 2000), and comes to serve as a substitute for open inter-generational communication surrounding sex, pregnancy and STIs. The resulting reduction in pregnancy risk, accompanied by less adult instruction of both adolescent girls and boys that can accompany this, has been linked with increased rates of sexual activity and lower rates of condom use (Kelly & Parker, 2000).

Alternatively (see part one, extract 17), mothers sometimes forbid their daughters to use contraception on the assumption that this will deter them from having sex. The South African literature suggests that when parents try to control their daughters' sexuality through this practice, fear of discovery and parental anger leads to lower use of condoms or birth control (Lesch & Kruger, 2005; Wood et al., 1997). More generally, parental practices of keeping their daughters under constant surveillance and supervision – keeping girls 'inside' and away from boys – can result in a scenario wherein young women have to confine their sexual activity to hurried, clandestine moments:

Extract 12

The pregnancy is caused by: if your parents are too strict with you, and when, they too strict with you, they don't want you to be out at a certain time, or whatever, they not going to let you see boys - when you do finally get the chance, maybe, like say you are supposed to go to school, and then you don't go to school, you go to your boyfriend, so that's whereby girls get pregnant, because they didn't get the chance to go to the clinic. So it just happens. [Xoliswa, MP]

As this extract suggests, parental techniques of controlling a daughter's sexuality constrain young women's potential to access contraceptives. South African literature reflects similar findings (MacPhail & Campbell, 2001). Furthermore, and also cause for concern, is the fact that all of these practices further compound a scenario where young women do not perceive themselves as sexual agents: who can determine the terms upon which they engage in sex, and who can take responsibility for, and take control and take care of their bodies. Again, echoing young women's explanatory accounts on first sex, the common refrain "it just happens" [Extract 12] resurfaces.

Young women's subordination to parental authority does not only occur in instances wherein parents exert overt control of their daughter's sexuality (as in instances of forbidden or, alternatively, enforced contraception). Furthermore, parental techniques for controlling a daughter's sexuality do not necessarily translate into unsafe sexual practices. In this study, many young women often attributed their decisions to abstain from sex, or to use contraception to fear of disappointing their parents, and mothers in particular, should they fall pregnant.

Extract 13

When girls fall pregnant, people say you've disappointed your mother ... Everything I do, I want to satisfy my mother; I like to impress my mother. Like, when I do have sex, I try all the time to use condoms. Because I don't want to become pregnant. [Zodwa, MP]

Here, a young woman actively 'chooses' to take up certain practices, without the material involvement of a parent. Nonetheless, the uptake of safer sexual practices, within such a scenario, does not translate into a sense of sexual agency and autonomy amongst young women, as is suggested by the following quote:

Extract 14

As young girls, we don't live our lives the way we want to. We just live our lives to impress our parents. That's all. To be what our parents want us to be. So, when you get pregnant, you think about, so what is my mother going to think? All of that ...

I really do respect my parents. It's because they, they've educated me, told me that I have to be strong and all those things. It's just that, my mother didn't go to school ... so she wants *me* to go to school and have the education that she didn't have. So I would like to fulfil her dreams; do something in life, for a change ... I have to fulfil their dreams, I have to be educated. I have to *do* something in life.
[Xoliswa, MP]

As discussed in part one, a chaste daughter – or, at least, a daughter who delays falling pregnant – reflects positively upon a mother and father, in terms of fulfilling their “role as parents” [Extract 19, part one]. Parents often impress the idea that delaying pregnancy will allow a daughter to have a ‘better life’ than theirs. Here [Extract 14], it is clear that young women internalise these ideals deeply, and are motivated to “fulfil” their parent’s dreams. Nonetheless, as this young woman’s accounts suggests, the pressure to accomplish what a parent could or did not is significant. As in their sexual relationships with young men, young women’s experiences take on the quality of self-surveillance: they relate to themselves and their bodies from the perspective of a parent and, while disciplining their bodies to meet parental expectations, lose touch with a sense of being an agentic, autonomous sexual subject - one who can make her own decisions and take action in a self-interested and self-empowered manner.

Scare tactics also still prevail as a common strategy whereby parents deter their daughters from sex. While the threat of pregnancy and disease are common-place within adult communication, these are often posited as inevitable consequences of sex, rather than unprotected sex per se. Anti-sex messages conveyed within this form of communication do not supply young women with information that they could potentially utilise to take care of their bodies in sex. Furthermore, as discussions with young women suggest, young people are not simply passive recipients of ‘scare tactics’; rather, they are actively engaged in interpreting the messages they receive:

Extract 15

I think young people are like not really sure that HIV exists ... They just think it's something our parents said to scare them away ... People actually think it's a myth that HIV exists; they think it's just our parents said ... Because the parents don't want their children ... to have sex. [Dudu, MP]

As discussed in part one, parents often utilise the threat of AIDS as a way of keeping the daughters engaged in age- and gender- 'appropriate' activities: this surfaced powerfully in one young woman's account, wherein a daughter who goes out too late at night is told that "you will get AIDS" (part one, extract 16). The extract presented above [Extract 15] suggests that, rather than impressing the reality of AIDS upon young women, relentless scare-tactics can actually translate into denial.

Religion, morality and sexual safety

As discussed in part one, moralistic rhetoric is part and parcel of young women's sexual socialisation: this discursive framing is most strongly represented by the parent generation and institutionalised religion, and emphasises the moral reprehensibility of sex before marriage. Moralistic rhetoric relies heavily upon disseminating an anti-sex stance, and also rests upon the presumption that children and adolescents are or should be sexually innocent. Resonating with other findings (see Fine, 1988), young women's accounts suggest that, by teaching anti-sex attitudes, sexual activity will not necessarily be forestalled, but may well discourage responsible contraception:

Extract 16

The church where I go, the priest is forever: don't have sex before you married. That is forever the message that they bring across. But ... it's almost like they don't care about the people that already had sex ... They not saying: use a condom if you have to; go to the clinic for birth control; things like that ... Because what the young people think is: ok, the priest isn't talking to me; I already had sex, so ... he won't worry about me. So ... they just having sex, and not even using a condom ... The priest and whoever is in the church think: mustn't have sex before you are married; must be a virgin; blah blah blah. But they not *opening their eyes* and *smelling the coffee*. Like, the *real* thing: children is having sex; *AIDS* is around. They just think that you *not supposed* to have sex. And they think that you *are not* having sex, but you are having ... [Nerissa, OV]

As this extract suggests, messages centring on the moral reprehensibility of sex before marriage can serve to silence the transmission of information around contraception. Young women's accounts suggest that it is not necessarily lack of information around contraception per se, but the manner whereby this information collides with moralistic, anti-sex messages that can amount to unsafe sexual practices. Fine (1988) argues that even when young people are informed about contraception, those who have internalised the notion that sex is 'bad' or 'wrong' may deny responsibility for contraception - as accepting responsibility would amount to 'owning up' to bad behaviour. Arguably, social pressure to disown conscious decision-making around sexual activity exerts a more forceful effect upon young women, given that societal emphasis and values around virginity are disproportionately linked with the embodiment of 'proper' femininity (and less with masculinity).

Extract 17

Sometimes, on talk shows, they talk about sex. They talk about using condoms; they debate about that. And there was a priest, and other people from AIDS companies. So, the priest says that you must not use a condom ... If a person doesn't do sex, he says, the condom will not be the issue. Because if the person don't do sex, he won't get AIDS; she won't get pregnant. So, the other people, from AIDS companies, they say that condoms *is* the right thing to use to prevent HIV and pregnancy. The things they were talking about, it was *serious* issues ... That priest, when he talk about condoms, I get things in my mind, like, why do people do sex? Why people use a condom? Am I doing a wrong thing when I'm having sex; am I doing a wrong thing when I am using a condom? ... It's confusing. When you go to church, you hear the Bible things. When you go out of the church, you hear another thing ... Like, in the TV – like in *Days*, and *Bold*⁴ – they all have sex ... [Zuki, MP]

Here [Extract 17], a young woman's account suggests that religious authorities are not only silent on the matter of contraception: in some instances, religious figures may actually give the injunction that "you must not use a condom". While the priest tags this statement with the caveat that condoms are unnecessary if "a person doesn't do sex", this young woman not only begins to question the morality of her engagement in sexual activity, but whether she is "doing the wrong thing" when she uses a condom. Young women's experiences of their emerging sexuality are thus situated in a culture

⁴ American soap operas – *Days of Our Lives* and *The Bold and the Beautiful* - screened back-to-back on late-afternoon South African television

replete with mixed messages about its acceptability, and how they should conduct their sex lives (Fine, 1988; Moore & Rosenthal, 1993; Tolman, 1994; 2000). This young woman is clearly grappling with what the 'right thing to do' is: must she heed what she fears in church, or follow the example of her favourite soap opera stars? Must she listen to the priest who says sex "young must not use a condom? Must she take heed of "people from AIDS companies" – who tell her that condoms are "the right thing to use" to prevent against pregnancy and disease?

Singer (cited in Reddy, 2003, p. 150) states:

One of the strategic utilities of the campaign for safe sex is the possibilities such a discursive framework offers for the remarketing of the nuclear family as a prophylactic social device. This strategy again takes an ironic cast when viewed from the history of women's and children's position within the family. That history reveals that the family has never been a particularly safe place for women and children. Most violence against women occurs within the family, as does the sexual abuse of children.

Reddy (2003) observes that the hegemonic concept that women's safety depends on the social organisation of the family has currently been repackaged for the new sexual era: "There is an advocacy of domesticated monogamous marital sexuality in this age that is concerned with the risks of multiple sexual contacts. As a consequence, the family has re-emerged as a prominent figure, and as a sanctuary from disease" (p. 150). This researcher argues that safe sex messages that go no further than advocating abstinence and delaying of sexual activity until marriage, means that young women enter marriage ill-prepared for sexual negotiation and sexual risk within a marriage.

Accessing contraception, condoms and health services: The presumption of guilt

Another scenario that constrains young women's ability to safeguard themselves against pregnancy and STIs relates to the practicalities of accessing health services and contraception. Young women's health-seeking behaviours are highly sexualised, and can attract sexual stigma. Young women often spoke of being received with

suspicion by health-care workers, even when seeking medication for something as ‘innocent’ as flu or a headache:

Extract 18

You might have the flu, or you might have a migraine. Or even if you go into a chemist – I know this, because I went into the pharmacy, and I went to go buy migraine tablets ... And then this lady in front was like, oh, don’t tell me you’re coming for birth control! And I was like, *excuse me?* ... I was like so embarrassed: is that what people really think? *Do I look like I have sex?* And *she’s* supposed to be there to *help* you with medication ... [Karen, OV]

Young women frequently recount experiences of being watched and judged when entering local clinics. Their accounts suggest that young women who are seen in such spaces are presumed ‘guilty’ of morally-questionable behaviour: they are either “having sex” [Extract 19], or dealing with the consequences of sex [Extract 19; 20]:

Extract 19

When you’re going into the clinic, people are watching you; they are judging you. That you are going to go there, like, to check if you are HIV positive or not, or you going to get the injection: you’re having sex ... They gossip a lot, ja. [Dudu, MP]

Extract 20

When you go to the clinic, people are like: oh no, that girlie is going for a pregnancy test. They always have that kind of mind, you know? That’s why I’m so, not *scared*, you know, but when I must go to the clinic, you always think, oh, people is going to think I’m going for a pregnancy test. And then you *look* behind you, and when you go in, the clinic is always full of people, and everyone is like, it’s like the centre of attraction: everyone is looking at you. And you *know* what’s going through their minds: you know? By the look people are giving you, you know... And those people working at the clinic are so *skinnerig* [gossiping] ... It definitely puts people off getting contraceptives ... [Chantelle, OV]

Young women often spoke of being received suspicion and disregard by the very figures who, by virtue of profession, are supposed to service their needs:

Extract 21

There's posters in the library: that you must come to the clinic if you sexually active; you must come fetch your injection, or pill, like birth control and things like that ... But then, if you *go* there, *thinking* that they gonna give you that - support or advice that they supposedly give - they still don't make you feel comfortable ... It's difficult ...
[Nerissa, OV]

The discomfort that young women experience when approaching adult health-care workers is not necessarily born of unprofessional practices per se: studies have found that, in some instances, health-care workers can experience embarrassment around offering open advice about condoms (Abdool Karim, Preston-Whyte & Abdool Karim, 1992).

Social versus physical integrity

Extract 22

Most girls ... don't worry about getting HIV. *All* they're worried about is getting pregnant. [Nomhle, MP]

The participants often expressed the view that young women are more concerned about falling pregnant than about contracting HIV/AIDS or other STIs [Extract 22]. The participants themselves also evidenced more personal concern surrounding pregnancy than HIV/AIDS and other STIs: sexually abstinent and sexually active participants generally attributed their decision to abstain or use birth control/condoms respectively to concerns with falling pregnant. Furthermore both groups of participants spoke frequently and spontaneously about the 'dire consequences' of teenage pregnancy, yet rarely about HIV/AIDS, unless when specifically probed. Other research findings drawn from the South African context report, similarly, that condoms are often used primarily as a contraceptive, and give statements from young people voicing more concern with pregnancy than with HIV/AIDS (Kelly & Parker, 2000).

Young women's evidently low levels of personal concern surrounding HIV/AIDS do not, by any means, appear to be a product of a lack of awareness; rather, somewhat

paradoxically, lack of perceived personal vulnerability was often attributed to *over-exposure* to relentless HIV/AIDS campaigns, as in this extract:

Extract 23

I don't, it's something I don't *really* like focus a lot on, on AIDS and HIV, because I don't think I'm really *worried* about it myself so much. You know? ... I don't think it's like such a big issue, because I think the media has sort of like, in a sense, shoved it down everyone's throats: so, like, all the teenagers now are AIDS aware ... I mean it's so insane, because they teach it to you at school *every single year*. And like, it's so much that it becomes: oh, well! It's just AIDS; you know, nobody cares, you know? And then they show you these pathetic videos on it ... They might show you some *skeleton* of a person – but it's *nothing* to someone. Or they give you the statistics: we don't care about the statistics ... [Helen, FH]

What is it, then, about pregnancy that sparks so much fear in young women, while the skeletal body of a person dying of AIDS [Extract 23] does not? During a focus group discussion [MP], young women contended that, if a girl has had unprotected sex, she would be scared that she may fall pregnant – and may go to the clinic for the 'Morning After' pill – but that she would "not even *think* about HIV". When asked why this is the case, the following responses were prompted which present some (somewhat disturbing) answers to the question posed above:

Extract 24

Like, HIV is not a big issue. Because if you [have] HIV/AIDS, some people won't even notice you have the disease. If you are pregnant, people will see that you pregnant. So, there's, I don't think there's a big issue with HIV... you won't see a person who has HIV... [Zuki, MP]

Extract 25

It's worse if you pregnant ... The thing is, if you get pregnant, then, in a period of nine months, your tummy will be there [*gestures a rounded stomach*] and everyone will see that you are pregnant. But when you are infected [with HIV], it will take a while for people to see. Because if you HIV positive, no one can recognise until you like in the later stages; you going to die. So I think that's the problem, you don't want people to know... [Dudu, MP]

These responses [Extract 24; 25] point towards the high priority that young women attach to social reputation and standing – to the point that social well-being is valued over physical well-being. The material suggests that the social repercussions of unprotected sex are of greater concern to young women than are its implications for physical health. The more immediate threat to social integrity that pregnancy poses appears to outweigh the more long-term threat of HIV/AIDS to physical integrity. Both ‘bodily conditions’ are seen as posing threats, not in-and-of themselves, but because of the potential negative social reaction that each condition may incite. The “problem” [Extract 25] is about *hiding* from others one’s sexual transgression – “you don’t want people to know” - rather than the physical implications of this ‘transgression’. Young women thus appear to employ a ‘*what will people think?*’ frame of logic when weighing up the health and reproductive risks associated with sex.

How can it be that the skeletal body of a person dying from AIDS “means nothing” [Extract 23], while the full-bodied person of a pregnant teenager signifies a fate worse than death? As long as girls conduct their contraceptive decision-making within a ‘what will people think?’ frame of reference, their sexual health will not be in their hands.

This mode of thinking refutes the ‘rational choice’ model of decision-making that underpins the prevailing sexual health promotion paradigm; it presents a different mode of rationality in operation: one wherein physical health is not first and foremost in young women’s concerns. Or, rather, a subjectivity that is not unified and coherent, but contradictory and fractured, a complex negotiation of competing discourses. Young women are not prone to unwanted pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease because they are passive or deficient in their decision-making – or make ‘bad’ choices. Rather, it is their active negotiation of a complex and constricting set of social rules, which are inherently *gendered*, that renders them vulnerable. Interrogating, challenging and redefining the rules of the game that girls are playing is critical – if they are not to lose their lives.

We need to address the way in which the quest for ‘social health’ undermines young women’s ability to safeguard their physical health. This requires challenging

discourses which frame female adolescent sexuality in terms of moral and social transgression – and result in girls keeping their sexuality ‘under wraps’ but simultaneously placing their bodies at risk. Interventions need to make it an imperative to address the manner whereby adolescent girls make their choices in the realm of their reproductive and sexual health in the disembodied manner that they do. The final chapter takes up, in greater depth, the theoretical and practical implications of these findings.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

This final chapter summarises and synthesises the key arguments of this thesis, discusses methodological issues and limitations, weighs up the significance of female adolescent sexual subjectivity as a topic of theoretical, feminist and practical relevance, and provides some practical recommendations for researchers and practitioners working within the field of (female) adolescent sexual health.

Summary and synthesis

In this part of the concluding chapter, I attempt to piece together the overarching story that the combined narratives of the young women participating in this study tell. A large part of this story is encapsulated in discursive silences and absences – which sometimes speak louder than words.

An absence of a positive discourse on female sexuality

Young women's talk reflects hegemonic constructions of female (hetero)sexuality as passive, lacking in desire, and object of and responsive to male (active) sexuality. Young women lack access to a discourse which frames female (hetero)sexuality in positive terms, and which names female sexual desire, and have difficulty accessing practical information surrounding the complexities of relationships, and the mechanics of conception and STIs. There are numerous social pressures, operating within and across a variety of relational contexts, which pose barriers to young women experiencing or presenting themselves as autonomous and desiring sexual

agents, and which stand between young women and their sexual empowerment and health.

Young women's accounts suggest that they are socialised into their sexuality in pervasively negative terms. Young women receive much of their sex education from adults within the contexts of the family, school and religious institutions. Within these contexts, talk is saturated with the dire – emotional, social, and biological – consequences of sex, and is frequently couched within a moralistic discourse, stressing the immorality of premarital sexual relations. The danger of male sexuality, and young women's potential to become 'victims' of male sexual desire, is frequently emphasised – yet, in practice, as young women observe, male sexuality receives little social censure.

In the context of the female peer group, communication around sexuality appears to be constrained by processes of exclusion and status-acquisition. While sub-cultural pressures within the peer group valorise sexual experience – and could thus stand as a site wherein a positive discourse of female sexuality could be nurtured – this is tempered by the threat of being labelled a 'slut'. Young women appear to invest much of their energy in preserving and defending their reputations, which often serves to reproduce rather than challenge gendered double standards underpinning the construction of masculine and feminine sexuality. Young women do not appear to communicate around sexual matters with their male counterparts – whether inside or outside of heterosexual relationships – fearing a partner's disappointment, or a negative reputation.

Given this scenario, young women enter into early heterosexual relationships and encounters relatively unprepared for the complex emotion- and power-laden experiences that these bring, and lacking in both vital information as well as a positive, agentic sexual identity. The absence of a positive discourse on female sexuality carries into young women's general accounts of heterosexual sexual and social relationships, and is implicated in reproducing gendered power inequalities in young women's heterosexual relationships.

The subtle workings of gendered power relations

In the absence of a discourse which centres female sexuality and desire, young women experience themselves as 'objects' in their heterosexual relationships and encounters. While young women's accounts suggest that male power and privilege is reproduced through overt domination and force, it is also clear that power inequalities are sustained by social constructions which lead young women to experience themselves as objects of male sexuality and desire. Being positioned as an object of male sexuality disconnects young women with their own bodily feelings and desires, and leads to self-surveillance. The self-surveying quality of young women's experiences of sexuality means that male privilege in heterosexual relationships is often supported by young women themselves. While young women recognise the power of male privilege in heterosexual relationships, they are often less conscious of the manner whereby they reproduce male power through their own receptivity and responsiveness to male needs and desires. Discourses of love and romance play a significant role in contributing to young women's subordination within heterosexual relationships and encounters: these discourses make it difficult for young women to recognise and name sexual coercion and/or rape, and contribute towards normalising coercive and violent practices within heterosexual relationships.

These findings suggest the value that post-structuralist theorising – which conceptualised power as dispersed, rather than unified, and which views individuals as self-policing subjects, rather than overtly policed by others – can bring to understanding gendered power dynamics in young women's heterosexual relationships and encounters. It is clear, from this material, that female heterosexuality, in this dominant form, is socially constructed to support male dominance – and, in such a scenario, (young) men can control sexual encounters without exerting overt pressure.

Furthermore, these findings warn against the assumption that male power – in or out of the bedroom – is monolithic. Some marginal voices – evidenced when young women voiced resistance to androcentric sexuality, and challenged male privilege in heterosexual relationships and encounters – were evident in this study. However, as

other researchers have observed (e.g. Holland et al., 1992), young women's empowerment is a tenuous and contradictory process, and intellectual empowerment does not translate in any direct or simple manner into experiential empowerment. Those young women who voiced resistance to androcentric sexuality, at some points, silenced their 'disruptive' voices at other moments, re-appropriating traditional versions of male and female sexuality. Furthermore, the findings suggest that, while young women are beginning to 'talk the talk' when it comes to gender equality, it is more difficult for them to 'walk the walk' – i.e. translate talk into practice within their heterosexual relationships and encounters. Of significance, in this regard, is that the young women voiced more resistance to androcentric sexuality during group discussions as opposed to individual interviews. This suggests that interventions that draw upon (single-sex) peer group discussions can potentially play a facilitating role in young women's ability to identify and challenge gender power inequalities in heterosexual relationships. This will be elaborated further at a later point in this chapter.

The limitations of 'rational choice' models

Young women's sexual agency and, in turn, their ability to safeguard their sexual health, is constrained by a complex and constricting set of social rules, which are inherently gendered. Concern with embodying societal conventions of what it deemed 'properly feminine' – being 'good girls', 'good daughters, and 'good partners' – drives young women's sexuality underground, and leads young women to place their bodies at risk. 'Good girls' do not display their sexuality openly, do not voice their desires, do not expect sexual pleasure, and do not seek out services, information or contraceptives, do not voice their desires, and do not expect sexual pleasure. Good girls do not enjoy an active role in sex. Girls who take up an active role in sex, or who try to take up responsible contraceptive practices, risk social censure – from partners, peers and adults. The threat of being 'unfeminine' and suffering a spoiled reputation coupled with the fear of disrupting relationships with significant others leads to a scenario wherein young women are more concerned with the social costs of adopting preventative behaviours than the health consequences of not doing so.

The study findings underscore the limited applicability of theories which conceive of sexuality as a site of rational, individual choice and agency. The KABP paradigm and related cognitive approaches to HIV/AIDS intervention (outlined in chapter one) fail to incorporate gendered meanings, role-expectations and power relations, which inscribe young women's subjective experiences of sexuality, and severely constrain the 'choices' available to young women within this context.

Gender matters in adolescent sexual health

One of the aims of this particular study was to attend to the manner whereby adolescent girls from different social groupings make meaning of and experience their sexuality. I embarked upon this study with the preconception that race- and class-related differences would play a powerful role in mediating young women's experiences of sexuality. Economic factors clearly play a mediating role in young South African women's experiences of sexuality, and serve to compound already-skewed gender relations. For example, as discussed in part five of the analytical chapter, socio-economic disadvantage compounds the coercive quality of sexual relations, reinforces the male appropriation of sexual desire and pleasure, and feeds into woman abuse in heterosexual social relationships. Reflecting the racialised stratification of South Africa, problems associated with poverty were mainly articulated by young women from historically marginalised racial groupings. Nonetheless, gendered cultural norms, expectations and power relations were found to be relatively continuous across class and racial groupings. It is clear from the study findings that gendered power inequalities – together with or outside of other forms of power inequalities - stand as a significant barrier to young South African women mobilising either their safety or pleasure in heterosexual relationships and encounters.

Generalising the findings

The discourse analytic foundation of this dissertation is critical of the idea of a universal 'Truth', and centres local context in the understanding of meaning, subjectivity and discourse. Furthermore, standard cautions need to be made regarding generalisation from a small sample. Nonetheless, many of the findings of this study

reflect those identified by studies conducted in international contexts – both in ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ countries (see, for example, the Women, Risk and AIDS Project studies conducted in Britain (Holland et al., 1990; 1991; 1992; 1994a; 1996; Thomson & Holland, 1998) and the Women and AIDS Research Program studies conducted in countries located in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia and the Pacific (Weiss & Rao Gupta, 1998; Weiss et al., 1996; 2000) respectively). Deconstructing and defining the complex concepts of sexuality and gender, developing insight into how these affect young women’s (and men’s) sexual health, and incorporating these insights into interventions is thus a critical task for researchers and practitioners working within the area of adolescent sexual health.

One discrepancy between the findings drawn from this research project, and those drawn from similar studies conducted in ‘developed’ countries is that the participants in this study displayed more adherence to traditional versions of femininity and masculinity, and male and female sexuality than do their counterparts in (developed) international contexts (e.g. the WRAP studies in Britain, cited above). In the context of South Africa, research that attends to instances wherein young women and men challenge and resist traditional gender roles and stereotypes is uncommon, and requires greater attention (Alexander & Uys, 2002; MacPhail & Campbell, 2001). South African studies that have attended to this issue find, similarly, that young people who evidence such resistance are in the minority (e.g. MacPhail & Campbell, 2001; Shefer & Foster, 2001). Shefer and Foster (2001) surmise that, in the context of South Africa’s political history, where class and colour oppression took centre stage in the struggle for liberation, discourses on gender inequality were consequently marginalised. As these researchers, and others (e.g. Posel, 2004), contend, the space for a clear feminist agenda has only been opened up during the contemporary period of transition.

Practical recommendations for research and intervention into female adolescent sexual health

The final part of this chapter provides a number of recommendations for researchers and practitioners working within the area of adolescent sexual health that emerged from this research project.

Giving young women a 'voice' in research and intervention

The young women who participated in this study engaged with the subject of sexuality in an enthusiastic manner. During reflective discussions at the end of focus groups and interviews, many of the participants maintained that this research project had provided them with the rare (and sometimes only) opportunity to talk openly about sexual matters. The participants' accounts suggest that young women are all too frequently spoken *to*, or spoken *of*, rather than experiencing themselves as speaking subjects in the realm of their sexuality. This finding points towards the importance of developing an adolescent sexuality research agenda that takes young women's views seriously. On a conceptual level, this requires proceeding from a perspective wherein female adolescent sexuality is conceived of as part of normal, healthy development – rather than one which conceives of this in problematic, deficit terms. On a methodological level, this requires approaches that treat young women as active subjects and meaning-makers, rather than as scientific 'objects' of study.

Interestingly, despite the fact that the common view expressed was that the female peer group is not a site wherein frank and comfortable communication surrounding sex can take place, the focus group discussions appeared to facilitate open communication, self-reflection, dialogue and active debate and contestation amongst peers. This suggests that, when facilitated by a trained observer, peer group discussions can provide an important source of support for young women. From this, I conclude that HIV/AIDS educational practices could benefit from emulating those which were adopted for this research project: namely, addressing young women as 'experts' - rather than as 'children', who should 'listen and not be heard' - and in an empathetic and non-judgmental manner. The utility of small group participatory

workshops is, therefore, not only a research method that can facilitate insight into the socially constructed meanings that young women attach to their sexuality, but could be applied in a potentially fruitful manner within the realm of intervention.

Re-evaluating the goals of (girls') sex education: Beyond 'just say no'

Sex education for young women needs to address more than simply the dangers that young women run in and from their sexuality: feelings, desire and pleasure need to be included. Young women require an education into the duality of their sexuality if they are to be released from a position of victimhood and receptivity to male's needs and desires. This requires 'safe spaces' (Fine, 1988) in which young women can explore both danger and desire, and "consider why their desire is so dangerous and how they can become active participants in their own redemption" (Tolman, 1994, p. 340). Young women "can be empowered to know and act on their own desire, a different educational strategy than the simplistic strategies for avoiding boys that they are offered" (Tolman, 1994, p. 340).

Tolman (1994) suggests that "the 'just say no' curriculum obscures the larger social inequalities being played out on girls' bodies in heterosexual relationships" (p. 340). While adults often rely upon 'scare tactics' – ostensibly in the interest of delaying first intercourse – "delay in first intercourse is perhaps an inappropriate goal ... to aspire to in sex education: rather, the appropriate goal should be to develop a sexually agentic individual who is able to manage her own sexual health" (Lesch & Kruger, 2005). As Lesch and Kruger (2005) contend: "Scare tactics ... do not facilitate self-reflexivity and internal locus of control regarding one's own sexuality" (p. 1080). Fine (1988) argues that access to health services, including family planning, information and contraception, rather than prompting or encouraging early sex, can actually lead young women to postpone sexual intercourse: as "the availability of such services may enable females to feel they are sexual agents, entitled and therefore responsible, rather than at the constant and terrifying mercy of a young man's pressure to 'give in' or of a parent's demand to 'save yourself'" (p. 46).

Stressing the ‘dangers’ of sex – biological, emotional and social – should not, therefore, come at the expense of addressing sexuality and sexual relationships in their full complexity. Ernhardt (as cited in Tolman & Diamond, 2001) calls for researchers and educators to shift their focus towards normalising and contextualising adolescents’ sexual feelings, and giving them the safety to consider multiple ways of expressing these feelings, emphasising sexual responsibility.

Bring in boys and men: Reconstructing masculinities

As other researchers and practitioners working in the area of adolescent sexuality and sexual health have pointed out (Burns, 2002; Macleod, 2006), sex education needs to target boys as well as girls if change is to be facilitated on a social level. At present, institutionalised sex education targets young women predominantly, while young men’s sex education tends to take place in informal contexts, such as on the streets and in conversation with other (young) men. For social change to occur, it is not enough to simply target young women: boys and men need to be included. Too often, boys and men are cast in stone as sexual predators, aggressors and ‘problems’ more generally (Pattman, 2005; Pattman & Chege, 2003), with young women their innocent victims. How, in this context, can young women learn to expect to be treated with respect? How can young women learn that, should they be sexually violated, their situation should not be tolerated? And how can young men learn, conversely, to respect and value an equitable sexual relationship with a woman?

Following this, I argue, along with others (e.g. Potts, 2002; Wilton & Aggleton, 2001) that the project of reconstructing femininity and female heterosexuality cannot be achieved without a simultaneous restructuring of male subjectivity. Female sexual subjectivity is currently lived through and against discourses which figure male sexuality in predominantly negative and dangerous terms. Over and above the need to detach female sexuality from a position of object of and receptivity to male desires and needs, and centre female sexuality in its own right, it is also necessary to decouple male sexuality from aggression and predation. Feminists’ efforts to develop a working model of the role that gender plays in adolescent sexual health (Tolman et al., 2003) have revealed that ideologies of masculinity and femininity, which infuse

constructions of adolescent male and female sexuality, 'fit together' in a manner that reproduces limited forms of sexuality and prevailing relations of power. These researchers argue that conventional and condoned masculinity ideologies about boys are relevant to both boys and girls and, concomitantly, femininity ideologies about girls are relevant to both girls and boys.

Furthermore, I argue, these two sites of change may be best be facilitated if young people receive at least some of their sex education in a mixed-sex context. It is clear, from this study, that the heterosexual dyad itself is not necessarily the 'safest' or most facilitative space for young women to interrogate their sexual feelings, as this site is one wherein the subtle workings of power are not always easily identified or challenged by young women. Nonetheless, I argue that single-sex intervention environments do not provide enough space for the deconstruction and reconstruction of female heterosexual sexuality. Pattman and Chege (2003) suggest that single-sex classes tend to reinforce assumptions that boys and girls are essentially different and in opposition to one another. These researchers found that during mixed-sex discussions boys and girls were able to learn from each other about their problems, concerns and views. The findings drawn from this study suggest that adolescent girls have few opportunities to have open discussions concerning sexuality with male peers. I believe that it is crucial to provide 'safe' *mixed-sex* environments for young men and women to interact around sexual matters *before* the insulated, emotionally-charged and socially-pressurised confines of early heterosexual dyadic relationships.

Finally, as a number of feminist researchers have argued (e.g. Hollway, 1996; Smart, 1996), it is also necessary to work towards the development of a positive discourse on heterosexuality, and a recognition of difference and variation in the forms that heterosexuality can take. As leading South African researchers working within a feminist post-structuralist framework have argued, "it is important to develop a discourse which is not only critical of dominant modes of heterosex and heterosexual relations, but also acknowledges variation within heterosexual practices, and the possibility of positive, enjoyable heterosexual relationships that resist hegemonic masculinity, femininity and heterosexuality" (Shefer & Foster, 2001, p. 387).

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Appendix A

English cover letter and informed consent form [participant]

Dear _____

I am a researcher at the University of Cape Town. I am currently carrying out a research study and would value your help.

I am interested in learning more about what teenagers think about sex and sexuality. I hope to learn more about how you, as teenage girls, feel that sex and sexuality affect your lives. I believe that your voices and experiences, as young adults, can provide a valuable understanding of how to give young South Africans the tools necessary to build themselves fulfilling relationships and healthy sexual futures.

The study will focus on female high school students located in high schools across three communities in the Fish Hoek Valley area: Fish Hoek, Ocean View and Masiphumelele. I would value your participation in the study greatly.

What will my participation involve?

- 1-2 group discussions with a group of girls who are attending your grade at your high school
- AND 1-2 individual interviews
- At a time that is convenient for YOU

If you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me, or call the organisation at which I am based directly.

I thank you for your help with this important study. Your participation improves our understanding of teenagers in Cape Town, and the concerns of young South Africans.

Sincerely,

Lauren Kahn
Researcher

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<http://www.uct.ac.za/depts/cssr/>

Informed consent form

I want to make sure that you, as the participant, understand the following information about the study:

- Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to take part in the group discussion and/or interview, and may stop at any time if you do not want to continue. You have the right to skip any particular question or questions if you do not wish to answer them.
- All information collected for this study will be kept strictly confidential. No information which could identify you or your household will be released. The findings collected will be used only for research purposes.
- Should you choose to take part in the study, you will be involved in 1-2 group discussion with a small group of your high school peers, and 1-2 individual interviews. These will be set up at your convenience.
- You have the right to ask questions at any point before the interview, during the interview, or after the interview is completed.

By signing below, you signify that you agree to participate in the study, and that your participation is entirely voluntary.

SIGNATURE

DATE

Appendix B:

English cover letter and informed consent form [parent/guardian]

Dear parent/guardian

I am a researcher at the University of Cape Town. I am currently carrying out a research study and would value the help of your daughter.

I am interested in learning more about what teenagers think about sex and sexuality. I hope to learn more about how teenage girls feel that sex and sexuality affect their lives. I believe that their voices and experiences, as young adults, can provide a valuable understanding of how to give young South Africans the tools necessary to build themselves fulfilling relationships and healthy sexual futures.

The study will focus on female high school students located in high schools across three communities in the Fish Hoek Valley area: Fish Hoek, Ocean View and Masiphumelele. I would value your daughter's participation in the study greatly.

What will my daughter's participation involve?

- 1-2 group discussions with a group of girls who are attending her grade at her high school
- AND 1-2 individual interviews
- At a time that is convenient for your daughter

If you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me, or call the organisation at which I am based directly.

I thank you for your help with this important study. Your daughter's participation improves our understanding of teenagers in Cape Town, and the concerns of young South Africans.

Sincerely,

Lauren Kahn
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Informed consent form:

I want to make sure that you, as the parent/guardian of the participant, understand the following information about the study:

- Your daughters' participation is entirely voluntary. She may refuse to take part in the group discussions and/or interviews, and may stop at any time if she does not want to continue. She has the right to skip any particular question or questions if she does not wish to answer them.
- All information collected for this study will be kept strictly confidential. No information that could identify your daughter or your family will be released. The findings collected will be used only for research purposes.
- Should your daughter choose to take part in the study, she will be involved in 1-2 group discussion with a small group of her high school peers, and 1-2 individual interviews. These will be set up at her convenience.
- She has the right to ask questions at any point before the interview, during the interview, or after the interview is completed.
- I ask you to initial the consent form I will read to your daughter.

By signing below, you signify that you agree that your daughter may be asked to participate in the study.

SIGNATURE

DATE

Appendix C:

isiXhosa cover letter and informed consent form [participant]

Molo _____

Ndingumphandi (Researcher) e Univesithi yase Kapa. Ndiphethe isifundo sophando lwaye uncedo lwakho luyakubaluleka kakhulu.

Ndinomdla ekufundeni ngakumbi ngokucingwa ngabantu abasebatsha malunga nokwabelana ngesondo. Ndinethemba lokufunda ngokuba nina njengamantombazana asemancinane kubuchaphazela njani ubomi benu ukwabelana ngesondo. Ndiyacinga ukuba amazwi enu nolwazi lweni, njengabantu abasakhulayo, lungaqulatha ukuqonda ekunikeni abantu abatsha base Mzantsi Afrika izixhobo ezibalulekileyo zokuzakhela nokufezekisa ubuhlobo nekamva lokwabelana ngesondo elilungileyo.

Isifundo sizakugxininisa kubafundi abangamantombazana abakumabanga aphezulu phakathi kwezixeko ezithathu kwisiphaluka sase Fish Hoek: Fish Hoek, Ocean View kunye ne Masiphumelele. Ukuthabatha kwakho inxaxheba kwesi sifundo kuya kuba luncedo kakhulu.

Kuya kuquka ntoni ukuthabatha kwam inxaxheba?

- Isinye ukuya kwisibini seengxoxo zeqela neqela lamantombazana abafunda kwibanga lakho esikolweni sakho
- Kunye nesinye ukuya kwisibini kovavanyo kwababini
- ngexesha eliyakukulungela.

Ukuba ngaba unayo nayiphi na imibuzo ngesifundo esi, nceda ungalibazisi ukuxhumana nam, okanye utsalele umbutho apho ndisebenza khona ngqo.

Ndiyabulela ngoncedo lwakho kwesisifundo sibalulekileyo. Inxaxheba yakho inyuse ulwazi lwethu ekuqondeni ngabantu abasebatsha e Kapa, neemfuno zabatsha base Mzantsi Afrika. Owakho,

Lauren Kahn
Umphandi

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Isivumelwano Esigunyazisiweyo:

Ndifuna ukuqinisekisa ukuba wena njengomthathi nxaxheba, uyaluqonda olulwazi lulandelayo ngesifundo esi:

- Ukuthabatha kwakho inxaxheba akunyanzelekanga. Ungala ukuqhubeka kwingxoxo Zamaqela / okanye uvavanyo, kwaye ungayeka nangaliphi na ixesha ukuba awufuni kuqhubeka. Unelungelo lokutsiba nayiphi na imibuzo ukuba awunqweneli kuphendula.
- Lonke ulwazi oluqokelelweyo kwesisifundo luya kugcinwa luyimfihlelo. Akukho nto eyakuba ichaza wena okanye omnye wosapho lwakho eyakukhutshwa. Izinto eziya kuba zifunyenwe ziqokelelwe ziya kusetyenziswa kuphela ngabaphandi (Researchers).
- Ukuba ngaba ukhethe ukuthabatha inxaxheba kwesisifundo, uyakubandakanywa kwisinye ukuya kwisibini sengxoxo zamaqela neqela elincinane labafundi besikolo sakho, kunye nesinye ukuya kwisibini sovavanyo kwababini. Oku konke kuya kuxhomekeka ngokwexesha lakho.
- Unelungelo lokubuza imibuzo nanini na phambi kokuba luqale uvavanyo, ngexesha lovavanyo, okanye emva kokuba uvavanyo lugqityiwe.

Ngoku sayina ngezantsi, uyaqinisekisa ukuba uyavuma ukuthatha inxaxheba kwisifundo, nokuba ukuthabatha kwakho inxaxheba alunyanzelekanga.

SIGNATURE

DATE

Appendix D:

isiXhosa cover letter and informed consent form [parent/guardian]

Molo Mzali

Ndingumphandi kwi Univesithi yase Kapa. Ndiphethe isifundo sophando lwaye uncedo lwentombi yakho luya kuba lolubaluleke kakhulu.

Ndinomdla ekufundeni ngakumbi ngokucingwa ngabatsha malunga nokwabelana ngesondo. Nditheмба ukufunda ngakumbi ngokuba amantombazana asemancinci kubuchaphazela njani ubomi babo ukwabelana ngesondo. Ndiyaqonda ukuba amazwi abo namava abo, njengabantu abatsha, lungaqulathat ukuqonda ekunikeneni abantu abatsha base Mzantsi Afrika izixhobo ezibalulekileyo zokwakha zifezekise ubuhlobo nekamva elilungileyo ngezesondo.

Isifundo siza kugxininisa kubafundi ababhinqileyo bamabanga aphakamileyo kwizixeko ezithathu ezise Fish Hoek: Fish Hoek, Ocean View kunye ne Masiphumelele. Kuyakubaluncedo kakhulu ukuthabatha kwe ntombi yakho inxaxheba kwesi sifundo.

Kuya kuquka ntoni ukuthabatha inxaxheba kwentombi yam?

- isinye ukuya kwisibini seengxoxo zeqela neqela lamantombazana abafunda naye esikolweni sakhe.
- kunye nesinye ukuya kwisibini kuvavanyo lwababini
- ngexesha elilungelene nentombi yakho

Ukuba ngaba unemibuzo ngesisifundo, nceda ungathandabuzi ukudibana nam, okanye utsalele umnxeba umbutho apho ndisebenza khona ngqo.

Ndiyabulela kakhulu ngoncedo lwakho kwesisifundo sibalulekileyo. Inxaxheba yentombi yakho inyusa ulwazi lwethu ngabantu abatsha e Kapa, nemfuno zabantu abatsha base Mzantsi Afrika.

Owakho,

Lauren Kahn
Umphandi

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Isivumelwano Esigunyazisiweyo:

Ndifuna ukuqinisekisa ukuba wena njengomzali womntwana uyaluqonda olulwazi lulandelayo ngesisifundo:

- Intombi yakho ukuthabatha kwayo inxaxheba akunyanzelekanga. Angala ukuthabatha inxaxheba kwingxoxo zamaqela okanye zovvanyo, kwaye ayeke nangaliphi na ixesha engafuni kuqhubeka. Unelungelo lokutsiba nayiphi na imibuzo ukuba akanqweneli kuphendula.
- Lonke ulwazi oluqokelelelwe esisifundo luyakugcinwa luyimfihlelo. Akukho lwazi luya oluchaza intombi yakho okanye umntu wakho oluya kukhutshwa. Okufunyenweyo kwaqokelelwa kuyakusetyenziswa kuphela ngabaphandi.
- Ukuba intombi yakho ikhethe ukuthabatha inxaxheba kwisifundo, uyakufakwa kwisinye ukuya kwisibini sengxoxo zamaqela neqela elincinci labasesikolweni sakhe, nesinye ukuya kwisibini seemvavanyo zababini. Oku kuyakwenzeka ngokuxhomekeka kwixesha analo.
- Unelungelo lokubuza imibuzo nangaliphi na ixesha phambi kovavanyo, ngexesha lovavanyo, okanye emva kokuba lugqityiwe uvavanyo.
- Ndiyakucela ukuba usayine incwadi yesivumelwano ndakuyifundela intombi yakho.

Ngokusayina apha ngaphantsi uyaqinisekisa ukuba intombi yakho ingacelwa ukuba ithabathe inxaxheba kwisifundo.

SIGNATURE

DATE

Appendix E:

Focus group schedule

1. Introduction

Hi, I'm Lauren. I'm a researcher at UCT. I'm doing a study about young women such as yourselves. I would like to get an idea of what sex means to young women such as yourselves, and other young women and girls in your community, and the role that sex plays in your lives. Recently, there has been a lot of hype about young people and sex, and the focus is usually on the negative consequences that sex can have in the lives of young people - such as HIV/AIDS and pregnancy. I want to avoid looking at sex only in this way, as sex is an unavoidable and natural part of growing up. Whether young people are, in fact, having sex or not, sex still seems to be an issue that is important in their lives.

In this workshop, I hope you will share with me how you feel sex fits into the everyday lives of girls growing up in your community. I am interested in hearing your own views of sex, whether sex is an important issue in your lives, how your everyday relationships and activities influence your feelings about sex and the decisions you make about having sex, your worries and concerns, the questions you have, the decisions you face, and both the positive as well as negative roles that sex can play in your lives.

In these work shops, I hope that you, as a group, can help me answer some of these important questions. Some of these questions I have already prepared, and will put to you soon. Some important questions may not be in my list: I will be most appreciative of you will bring up questions that you think are important in your lives that I may have left out. You can do this as we go along, or I will give us some time at the end to discuss issue that have not come up naturally in the discussion, but that you feel have relevance in your lives.

2. Climate-setting exercise

This is the exercise of getting to know one another, establishing boundaries and rules (such as respect, confidentiality, tolerance etc.), procedural issues, and answering questions from the group.

Before we begin, I just want to say that I understand that sex is not always an easy topic of conversation for everyone. In order to make everyone feel comfortable within these workshops, I think we should begin by laying down some basic ground-rules.

- Confidentiality: our words will not be carried outside of this room
- Respect: even if we do not agree with the views of others, we will respect their opinions. Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but I would also like to encourage debate: if you have a different view to someone, let them have their say, but please voice your own views afterwards.
- Etc...

3. Ice-breaker: Free association word game

Aim: to encourage openness and free expression.

Instructions: write down, on the paper I have provided, as many words that come to mind when I say 'sex'. Have fun, think openly, and feel free to put down whatever comes to mind.

e.g. Pleasure, pain, coercion, desire, power, status, trust, love, lust, curiosity, boredom, escape, rebellion, experimentation, reproduction, relationships, bodies, health, risk, thrill etc.

The exercise will lead into my emphasizing that sex can have many meanings that may change as we move across time, places and through our various relationships. This will lead into my defining the object of the workshop: "This workshop will

hopefully give us a chance to explore the many meanings that sex may have in the lives of young women and girls in your community”.

4. Establishing the importance of sex/sexuality in the lives of young women

I'd like to start the discussion by asking you whether you feel that sex is an important issue in, or aspect of your lives, or the lives of young women in your community more generally. Do you think this is a relevant and important topic for us to discuss?

5. Contextualising sex in the lives of young women

I'd like us to start thinking about how sex fits into your everyday lives. I would like to start by getting you to tell me a bit about what it's like, more generally, to be young women growing up in your community. What are some of the activities you're involved in, where are the different spaces you move between, who are the important people and relationships in your lives?

Now, can you tell me whether, and how, sex features within these relationships, activities and spaces. Can you think of any spaces, relationships, activities that have not been mentioned that sex is an issue in relation to?

Contextual examples:

Spaces: e.g. school, work, home, health-care, employment, leisure and social spaces, extra-curricular involvement etc.

Relationships: e.g. peers/friends, teachers, family (parents, siblings, aunts etc.), boyfriends, girlfriends etc.

6. What messages are in operation within and across these contexts?

Facilitate discussion about pressures – relating to their actions or behaviour, feelings and image – that girls are faced with. Emphasise that some pressures can make us do

things we do not want to, while others might act to restrain us from doing what we want to do.

Facilitate discussion about expectations of what is appropriate across different spaces and relationships. Do the girls feel that they face certain pressures relating to their actions, behaviour, feelings or image? Explore contradictions and how these are negotiated.

Direct discussion towards issues of power: how much power do young women have over where they stand in relation to sex? Bring in the issue of gender: do young women face specific pressures, have specific desires etc. that diverge from those of boys in their community? What are these? Where does the difference lie? How do girls feel about difference?

7. Sexual decision-making, practices and consequences

Discuss what makes young people get involved in sex, at what stage they start sexual activity, who controls sexual initiation and how it happens, the importance of sexual relationships for young women, the role of peer pressure, and of other relationships, and their vision of the ideal partner.

- What are some of the reasons that make girls in your community decide to have sex?
- What are the reasons girls have that influence them not to have sex?
- Can girls make the decision of having sex themselves, or is this decision sometimes affected by other people?
- Who are the people that affect this decision?
- Decisions surrounding contraceptive use
- Experiences of pregnancy; HIV; STI's
- Give me a picture of a typical relationship. Now give me a picture of your ideal relationship

8. Sex and embodiment

- We have focussed attention on some of the social (and personal) pressures that young people face in relation to sex. What about the physical aspects of sex, such as pain or pleasure? Sometimes we ignore the physical side of sex in the lives of young people because we focus so much on health, risk and social pressures. Is this aspect of sex important for young people? Do young people talk about it? Hear about it?
- Bodies, sex and health: bring in sexual health and risk / reproduction, HIV/AIDS and contraception / knowledge and attitudes etc.

9. Concerns, challenges and support

- Do you, as a group, feel that young women and girls in your community have a lot of questions regarding sex?
- Do the spaces and relationships you move between offer a safe environment in which you can raise these questions? Find answers to these questions?
- What do you think are some of the most important questions that a young women or girl in your community may typically have in relation to sex?
- What do you think are some of the biggest challenges a girl may face in relation to sex?
- What do you think are some of the positive roles that becoming sexually mature plays in a girls' life?

10. Reflections and questions

Appendix F

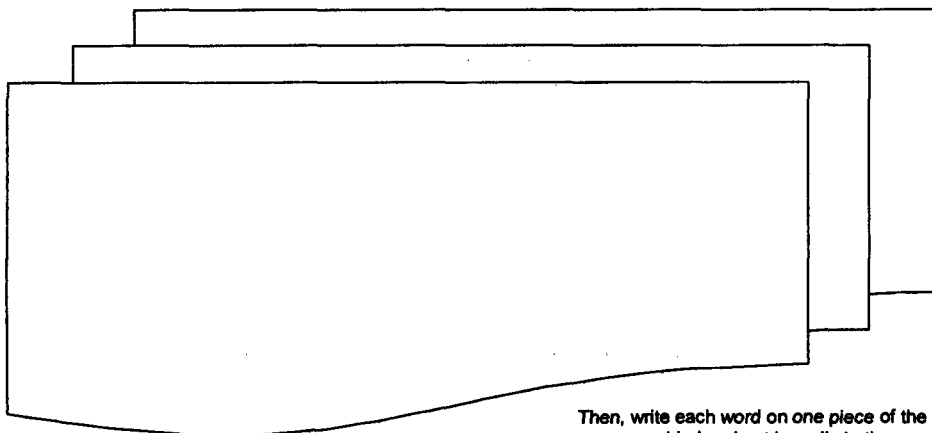
Individual workbook sample [reduced from A4 size]

My worksheets

Name: _____

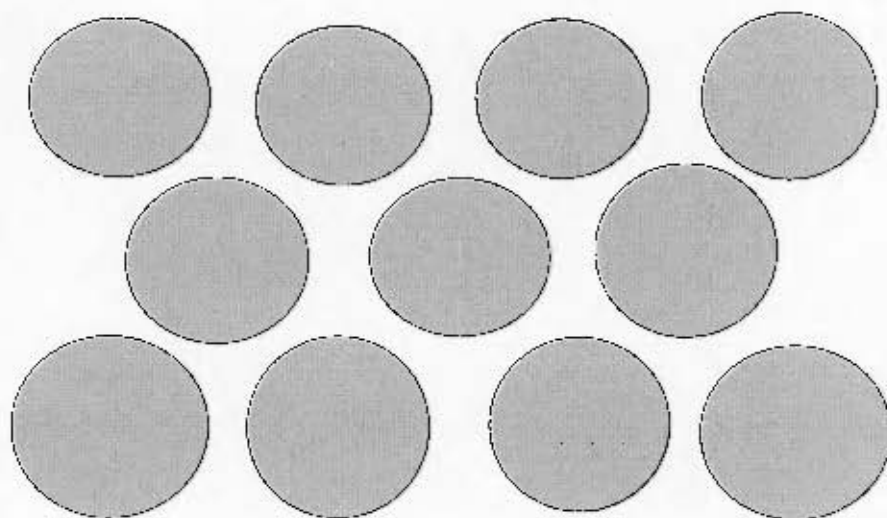
Ice-breaker: Word game

- Write down, on this piece of paper, as many words that come to mind when I say the word 'SEX'. Have fun, think openly, and feel free to put down whatever comes to mind!

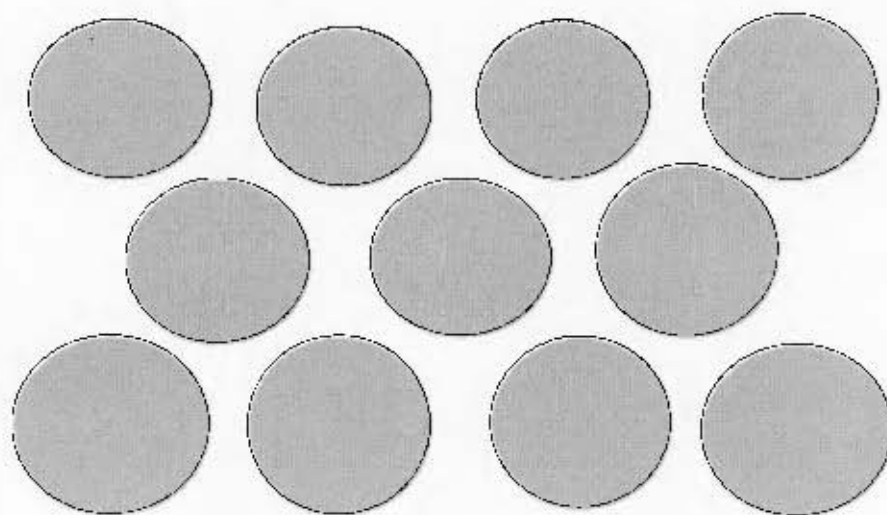
Three overlapping rectangular boxes are provided for writing words. The boxes are arranged in a slightly offset, overlapping manner, with the front box being the largest and the two behind it being progressively smaller and shifted to the right and upwards.

Then, write each word on one piece of the paper provided and put in a pile in the middle of the table. No one will know who's words are who's.

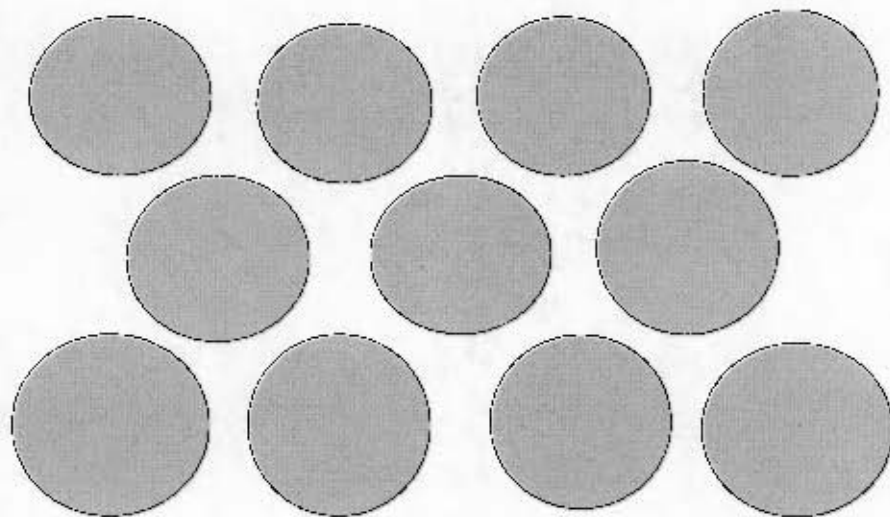
Important spaces



Important activities



Important people / relationships



My private notes